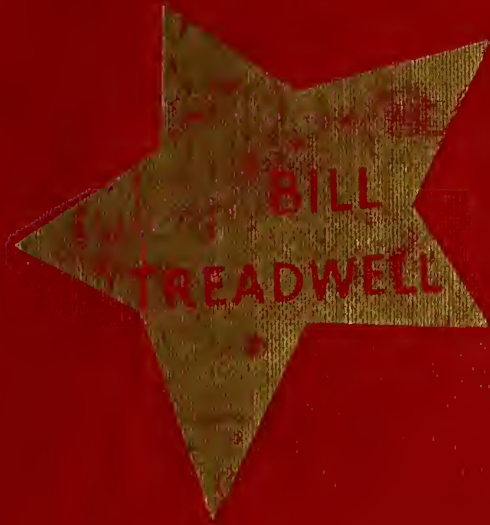




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50 YEARS
of American Comedy

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Give It to Me Easy

Big Book of Swing

How to Buy a Used Car

Gabby Scoops, Junior Reporter

50 Years of American Comedy

50 YEARS
of
American Comedy

by Bill Treadwell



EXPOSITION PRESS

NEW YORK

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This book is dedicated

to a real funny guy, the late

RAGS RAGLAND . . .

and to my two sons,

BRIAN AND BILL, JR.

B. T.

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Part I

Comedy—Its Heritage



1



THE VANISHING HERD

It has been said time and time again that there are two things people must do. One is cry, the other, laugh. But it is much harder to laugh than it is to cry; and that is the greatest excuse for comedians. Yet per capita we have fewer comedians today—when we need them most—than members of any other professional group.

People during the last few years have been inclined to retreat more and more into themselves because of the many problems and frustrations of present-day living. Psychiatrists can tell you the worth of a bellylaugh, a relieving chuckle, a smile.

The hardest thing for a man to do today is to relax. Everyone is under pressure. Modern society has put man in a position where he must be informed of many subjects; and one craving that pops up is for comedy, even to the point of slapstick. You have probably noticed slapstick scenes in current movies, and the wide appeal they have. Audience reaction often borders on the hysterical. Television programs, too, have turned to this form of comedy.

Yet, like the American buffalo, the art of great comedy faces extinction from the face of the earth. Unless the training of young and upcoming funnymen is put on a par with education for other arts and professions, we may find the American stage, airwaves, and television screens of tomorrow completely devoid of comedians.

You wouldn't think of launching yourself on a law, medical, dramatic, or painting career without the necessary formal instructions and schooling. Yet most people have the idea that being a comedian is an easy task. Some think you have the talent to make people laugh or you don't, and that's that. Consequently, since the turn of the century, the fine art of comedy has been neglected and ignored.

In 1900, family burlesque, as it was termed, started to ride high around the United States. There were also the minstrel groups, the showboat troupes, and the traveling tent shows. Then as now, the accent was put on comedy situations, with comedians and straight-men necessary to carry home the needed punch.

Burlesque progressed through these early years, and early in the century the two most important burlesque circuits in show business developed, The American Wheel and The Columbia Wheel. Once a comedian got himself connected with one or the other, he could be pretty sure of a job for a while.

Burlesque as such became a preparatory school for comedians. It was with the seasoned comedy trouper that the youngster interested in various forms of stage humor, whether it be pantomime, goon comedy, or flippant lines, learned his formal lessons.

These powerful outlets for gentlemen and ladies with comedy leanings have deteriorated into what remains with us today as the Izzy Hirst Circuit, a poor relative to the powerhouse wheels of yesteryear.

Those supposedly in the know think that even if we had the old burlesque circuits back today we still wouldn't be able to manufacture comedians in sufficient quantity to fulfill the great demand that the variety stage, the radio, and the now hungry television have placed upon the market.

There was a time when the kids on your block wanted to be the President of the United States or a famous detective or a singer like Crosby, but that changed with the coming of Berle and Godfrey and their "almost-a-million-a-year" salaries. Kids are hungry in this day and age to be comedians. Remember when Joe Penner was around? Every kid in the nation who could talk was imitating his "Do you wanna buy a duck?"

Right before Penner died I asked him what had been his biggest thrill since he had hit the big time from the burlesque stage.

"My biggest thrill," said Joe, "came after the first broadcast on which I used 'do you wanna buy a duck,' and a group of kids wrote to me and said they were using the phrase as a password for their club." Joe was always proud that he was associated with clean comedy and was out of burlesque when it started to become the smutty circuit.

In 1948 it was the former burlesque comedians who saved the season for Broadway. Phil Silvers, Bobby Clark, Bert Lahr—all burlesque graduates—were playing in the hit shows. Dozens of supporting burlesque comedians were in the casts with these headliners and playing in other shows.

1949 found the scene the same with Clark moving over from "Sweethearts" to a still greater hit, "As The Girls Go," and Bert Lahr leaving the revival of the play "Burlesque" and going on the road with the hit show, "Make Mine Manhattan," to strengthen the role played by Sid Caesar, who made his first real bid to fame in this opus in New York.

The United States will be the greatest sufferer in this comedian crisis. Even motion-picture companies have been thrown for a loss on their presentation of comedy material. They took a guy like Henry Morgan, a product of radio, tossed him into a picture without lessons in acting, and expected him to ham through it. He did and we all suffered.

Henry wasn't ready for Hollywood; he wasn't ready for the stage; he just wasn't ready. A former disc jockey who'd been given a break by WOR, Mutual's New York outlet, and who because of publicity had become a fad and a fancy, Henry would be in the top Hooper heap today if he had had the proper education in comedy and the seasoning that comes from stage training.

The courts of Europe never experienced a shortage of jesters that could possibly compare to the lack of funnymen facing the American public today. We should thank the powers that be for the humble disc jockey and the women's commentator, who, in their modest or immodest way, give us a daily laugh or two.

Burlesque is dying a slow death not only in New York, its

old stronghold, but throughout the United States. In sections of the country where it *is* permitted to operate, its state is a cancerous one.

We are not left wanting for nudity, as night clubs and the legitimate musical comedy stage give us plenty of legs, navels, and busts. However, we are wanting for comedy, that rich comedy, that real down-to-earth humor that was once a part and parcel of the work of every comedian and dialectician.

Burlesque in the old days was a family show. And it was more—It was a preparatory school for comedians. It made a millionaire out of Billy Watson, who owned the famous Beef Trust. Yes, Watson was good burlesque and so were Boob McManus, Bozo Snyder, Tom Howard, Dave Marion, Edmond Hayes, Bert Lahr, Joe Penner, and Jim Barton. So were Fanny Brice, Ethel Shutta, Zella Russell, and Alice Clarkson. Sliding Billy Watson, not to be confused with the above-mentioned comic of the same name, was another burly immortal.

What made these characters stick in your memory? Plainly, simply, they were funny. What laughs they didn't get from the flip of their tongues were made up by zany attire, wacky hats, and missing teeth. Billy Watson exploited oversized chorus girls. His burlesque skit, "Krausemeyer's Alley," was world-famous. Billy was born Isaac Levy and changed his name when he filled in for a sick singer named Billy Watson.

The ever-funny Klein Brothers did their routine in German dialect with a big chunky blonde dressed in a short skirt to show off her dimpled knees—which she could make wink at you. But even her dimpled knees didn't take your interest away from the humor which emanated from these two characters. They were really funny. They made people laugh, laugh so they felt it way down in their bellies, deep in their hearts.

Al Reeves, who shouted "Give Me Credit Boys," was known by his dilapidated brown derby. Pat White, usually featured with his "Gaiety Girls," was one of the better Irish comedians. Then there was Lew Kelly, billed as the "Dope Fiend," Edmond Hayes, who used the tag line "The Original Wiseguy," Jack Reid, the "Information Kid," and Boob McManus, whose bald head, round

face, hickish clothes, and flashy gab made him a spotlight character on the Columbia Wheel Circuit. It was from the burly stage that Clark and McCullough went on to musical comedy fame. You remember them if you're comfortably middle-aged. If you don't, then you've heard of them.

Brooklyn, the town that likes to take credit for a tree and a baseball team, can also take credit for supporting four famous burly theaters, the Star, Empire, Casino, and Gaiety—all producing at one and the same time.

The popular Flatbush Café on Flatbush Avenue was opposite the Brooklyn Casino. The café acted as a sort of reception room, smoking lounge, and stopping place at intermission time. Members of the audience would dash out between acts, not only to evade the novelty salesman known as the "Candy Butcher," but to toss down a quick eight ounces of beer. The barkeeper there would line up fifty beers or more and as the folks came rushing in he would shoot beers down the bar one at a time to the begging hands with the precision of a fine bowler tossing a ball down the alley. The warning bell rigged up in the café would ring in sufficient time for the burly patrons to get back in their seats just as the candy butcher was leaving his pedestal. Many times an Amateur Night program or a wrestling stint was the opening part of the second act—and no one wanted to miss these attractions.

Comedians, not the slick strippers or the girls in the chorus line, were the heralded headliners. When a unit featured someone like Bozo Snyder, the Tramp Comedian, you would find a well-rounded show built along musical comedy lines with a vague plot, colorful costumes, and plenty of songs and dances, many especially written for the show. Other traveling units featured favorites like Harry K. Morton and Zella Russel, who later played in many of Shubert's famous revivals of hit shows; George Stone and Etta Pollard; Zella ("She dances with veils"); or Rose Sydel and her popular "London Belles." The ardent male admirer liked to see a little flesh on his chorus girls in those days and Billy Watson toured with belles who tipped the scale at 190 or better. Here were all the curves outlined—just what daddy had been waiting for!

Amateur Nights and Wrestling were supplementary features

on the program. Usually a house would feature a wrestler for a week or two. This snortin', distortin' man of the mat would take on all comers. Even your Uncle Al, if he had the guts to romp the stage in leopard tights. One of these characters was George Bothner, who made a name for himself at Miners in the Bronx. One week he would wrestle Japanese style using feet, and another week Roman style, no holds barred. Other muggers like Young Monday, Jim Galvin, Leo Pardello, Jim Londos, The Zbyzsko Boys, Strangler Lewis, Ivan Linow (the Russian lion who later went into pictures), and the Masked Marvel traveled the burly houses.

The organized burly units traveled the circuits sometimes for more than forty weeks at a stretch. All of them carried fancy names to bring attention to the new show coming into town. The advance posters that were put up around the town were gay, colorful, and to the point. With the comedian getting top billing, and the name of the revue in second place, the rest of the poster contained a picture of a lady of the ensemble in pink or white tights in a "come-on" pose, the kind that makes a college boy "cut classes" or a soldier go "over the hill." Some of the unit names were "The World of Pleasure," "Lady Buccaneers," "The Gaiety Girls," and "The Step Lively Girls." Jean Bedini traveled with the "Puss-Puss Company." These were the gals who adorned the covers of the *Police Gazette*.

Usually the best unit of the year would play its summer engagement for from six to eight weeks at the Columbia Theater in midtown New York. Most other houses were closed around the country during the summer months. The Columbia was the "Palace" of the burlesque circuit.

Barney Gerard's Follies carted thirty girls—count 'em—around the circuit. Barney was sued by Ziegfeld for using the Follies title, but won the case.

The Columbia, later changed to Loew's Mayfair, used the slogan "Family Burlesque." And you could bring the family, too, because everyone from grandma to sister Sal could laugh and have fun. For old-fashioned burly was never raided. In fact many church groups would buy out blocks of seats for theater parties.

There were no shows on Sunday. This was traveling and rehearsal day, and only concerts were presented. The cast would appear in street clothes. Backstage on the bulletin board was the usual letter signed by the manager. It said in effect that everyone appearing on the stage of the theater was to keep his act clean and that "the use of vulgar and abusive language was prohibited."

Burlesque in its heyday was a two-show-a-day routine. By the thirties it was a six- or seven-a-day grind depending upon the appeal of the leading stripper or on what scandal she had recently been involved in. The doors opened at 10 A.M. and closed sometimes well after midnight. But the shows got so lousy that you wouldn't sit through it twice over, no matter how cold it was outside.

Stealing a gag routine or a comedy sequence in the old days was unheard of. Each comic started out at the beginning of the season with a set formula and stuck to it during the entire time he was playing the circuit. Many of their routines were taken from legitimate musical comedies, and bought from the producers.

A great many Jewish comedians and dialecticians could be found traveling the burlesque circuit. Some of them, when they returned to New York after a tour, would venture into the Yiddish Art Theatre on Second Avenue, where several Yiddish musical comedies were featured each season. Burlesque lost many of these comedians when Ann Nichols sent eight road companies out at the time "Abie's Irish Rose" was a success on Broadway. Burlesque fans will long remember Abe Reynolds, the dialectician, the Fox and Stewart act, and many, many more.

During the past ten or fifteen years it has been the strippers who have received the big build-up as headliners on the burly circuits. Some of the favorites have included Margie Hart, "The one and only, and Queen of them all," also known as the Poor Man's Garbo; Ann Corio, the stripper of the mental type, who had done a lot of acting in stock companies; Marion Miller, billed as the "Queen of Quiver"; Rosita Royce, who danced and stripped while her trained doves rested on her body; Lois De Fee, who gave you a lot for your money—she was six-foot-six; Sherry Britton, who left the burly stage and found night-club and theater audiences

very receptive to her long dark hair and her Venus-like body; Betty Rowland, who was quite a toe dancer—but like the rest of the gals on this list, her clothes got in her way. No lineup of present day burlesque queens would be complete without a mention of writer-actress Gypsy Rose Lee; Julie Bryan, a big, beautiful blonde one, long and lanky; Georgia Southern, who appeased the boys with her fast-moving actions; and Sally Keith, who amused the males by rotating tassels which were anchored to a net bra. Nevada Smith was one of the few Broadway showgirls who went to burlesque strips after showgirls lost their place in musical comedies to modern interpretive dancing in the early years of the war.

As the motion picture companies expanded and new theaters were built, many of the better burly acts went into vaudeville. Burly headliners were making their names in musical comedy and the burlesque circuit started to suffer. Many straight-men and handy men around the theater went to Hollywood and the Keystone Cops. This shortage of comedians and better acts was not felt immediately, as the circuit could train new ones as fast as the cream of the crop departed. The turnover didn't continue, though, and to take care of the comedy shortage, girls and more girls were used. When smart promoters like the Minsky boys started to get hold of the burlesque reins, they lost no time building up the tall, lean, and sexy strippers who paraded the country over. They took off everything but the tiny G string to such national favorites as "All of Me, Why Not Take All of Me." There was nothing left for the male to applaud except the stripper's encore, which usually was a "bump" aimed diagonally across the audience at a forty-five-degree angle and a bald-headed man the same age.

City officials started a cleanup, so New York, once the metropolis for burlesque, lost its prep school for comedians.

For the folks who have not had the pleasure of witnessing modern burlesque and for the New Yorkers who have had burlesque taken away, here is a typical spiel used by the concession man who comes out between shows while they are moving the sound equipment for the gala extravaganza, featuring Stinky and

Shorty, lovely Margie Hart, and the Parisienne chorus. He is the candy butcher, and the performance he gives is often funnier than that of the comedians. It runs something like this:

“And now ladies and gentlemen . . . while they are moving the talking apparatus for the big Follies show to begin—we are offering for sale what we consider one of the choicest candies on the market. As you all know, each week we try to plan some very special offer for the patrons of this theater. This week we were very fortunate in purchasing a famous brand of Atlantic City Salt Water Kisses, pure and delicious—all flavor candy. And here is the big free offer—direct from the famous Music Halls of Paris—sixteen pages of revealing photographs—just hold any page up to the light like this and you will see the figures in a pose extraordinary—beautiful ladies revealing their hidden charms—posing just as you want them. But that’s not all, we were able to find a famous manufacturer who sold us his entire stock of pin-seal leather wallets, cigar and cigarette cases, perfumed lipsticks, pen-and-pencil sets, cigarette lighters, and cellophane suspenders. And now if the boys will step up front we will start passing these out. We have put these famous gifts in some of the boxes . . . boys, pick out two cigarette cases . . . two pin-seal leather wallets, two famous lipsticks, and two of each of our popular gifts. We are offering this combination for only twenty-five cents, one quarter of a dollar, only twenty-five cents . . . just think of it—famous girls of Paris in their revealing poses, salt-water taffy direct from Atlantic City, and these handsome gifts for men and women—gifts that would cost you several dollars in any store. Let’s all get in the spirit here—all right boys . . . pass up and down the aisles—boys in the balcony—start your sales.”

At this point all the salesmen start yelling at the same time, “Who’ll have the next box . . . only twenty-five cents . . . how about the gentleman over there?” Watching the crowd, the head concessionaire spots a fellow who really got a box of candy with a prize in it and he immediately says, “Gentlemen, stop the sale” . . . and then he goes into another sales talk repeating the sensa-

tional offer he is making, the terrific candy he is giving away. Maybe you know the gimmick, but you sort of like it. As a matter of fact the sales talk is amazingly funny.

Burlesque left Broadway. It had established a set formula that each new weekly show followed. The rehearsals were held late at night, and usually if the new show opened Friday, rehearsal for the opus would start Sunday night.

Let's look into a Harold Minsky production. All hands would meet after the show. Billy Koud was in charge of the dance routines. Koud would meet with Bronson, the stage director, and decide what kind of dancing scenes the show would feature. The three comedians and one or two straight-men would get together to decide what comedy routines would be used and what props they needed. Rags Ragland, Phil Silvers, and Red Marshall were the most popular trio of comedians when burlesque left New York. Frank Scannell was their straight-man, and a good one at that. With this show, one male singer like Chet Atland was usually featured. To balance the nudity, strippers of different types were tossed into this burly combine. In a show that featured Margie Hart, you would usually find Carrie Finnell, the bust charmer, and perhaps Betty Rowland, who darted back and forth across the stage on her toes like streaked lightning while unbuttoning things.

Many strippers had real beauty, and the most beautiful of them all was Maxine De Shone, who, when playing Fay's in Philadelphia, caused a woman in the audience to shout, "Don't strip, you're too beautiful." Georgia Southern always gave the drummers a headache, as she wanted every body motion extremely accentuated with an offbeat cymbal or heavy drum beat. Though she fought with these musicians endlessly, she usually got her way.

If you have seen two or three burlesque shows you will remember stirring blackouts like "Suck a Lemon," "Under the Bed," and the famous routine "Crazy House," ending with the expression "Say No More, Joe."

This last one is really typical of sloppy burlesque and was always good for killing (murder may be a better word) from twenty to twenty-five minutes of the entertainment bill.

The old Olympic on Fourteenth Street had a girl come out and wiggle for the boys during the intermission to hold the guys in their seats until the candy butcher could get his spiel out. She made a name for herself—Gilda Gray.

But vulgar or not, burlesque was not only the steppingstone for comedians and comediennes but also for producers. The team of Gordon and North is a famous example. Cliff Gordon did a "German Senator" act, sort of Will Rogers in dialect, and Bobby North played it straight. Cliff died several years ago and we found Bobby a producer at Republic Studios in Hollywood. Cliff's brother, Dave, went on to take over the burlesque interests, and another brother, Max, came along to become a top producer on Broadway.

Comedy during the last few years of burlesque in New York was at its lowest ebb. The old vulgar gag where the policeman swung his club between his legs was done in every show. Another, where the innocent girl sends all her visiting boy friends under the bed when she suspects her husband is returning, was a frequent bit of substandard equipment.

It was the late Paul Moss, former License Commissioner, who halted such shows in New York. But some moved over to the legitimate stage, where you pay up to six dollars a seat.

"Star and Garter" was written along good burlesque lines. Michael Todd, its producer, deserves credit for his spunk in producing what the public wanted at a time when the Commissioner was gunning for the very thought of burlesque. Long live burlesque. If it hadn't been for it, you wouldn't have had Baby Snooks. Or even Banjo Eyes Eddie Cantor, for that matter.

Some of the greatest comedians in show business come from the burlesque halls. Jim Barton, who proved his ability on Broadway as Jeeter Lester in "Tobacco Road," was one of these. Joe Frisco is another. The old Brighton Beach burly fans loved him, though he doesn't like to admit it.

Burlesque in its later years offered fairly steady employment. This gave a comedian a good chance to study, train, and collect comedy material for each season's work. Rags Ragland, for in-

stance, played at the Irving Place Theatre for four straight years. When he left he was getting \$150 a week and that was big money in the early thirties.

Yes, burlesque murdered itself—but it also left something behind it. It left a lot of talent. Talent which it had patiently trained to go on to bigger and better things. . . .



2



THE GRAND OLD DADS

There have been many great vaudevillians, many great night-club, radio, and film entertainers who have left to the heritage of the American stage a tradition of which comedy can be justly proud.

But there are and were a few great men who have originated a style, or blazed a trail that has become a heritage for others to follow. These are the Shakespeares, the Henry James's, the Whitmans of the comedy world. These are the men who are loved not only by their audiences, past and present, but by the men in their own field as well. They are the Grand Old Dads of Comedy.

Between jobs as a newsboy, truck driver, and boxer, Rags Ragland worked as an assistant projectionist in his native Louisville, Kentucky. He threw motion pictures on a screen, never thinking for a moment that he would some day see his own antics up there on the white canvas.

It is characteristic of him that he referred to his Hollywood success as a transition from rags to britches. He was born with the dignified name of John Morgan Ragland, but he became Rags to all who knew him. As a kid, he was hard on clothes, and that may account for the nickname.

His father, Adam Ragland, was a building superintendent, and his mother, Estelle Petty Ragland, kept house and at the same time maintained a close watch on John Morgan. He attended

public school but without enthusiasm, leaving it early and often when opportunity or temptation presented itself.

Before he was twenty, Ragland was fairly well known around Louisville as a boxer, a good raconteur, and an expert pool player. A friend in show business proposed that he try for a spot with Minsky's Burlesque in New York, which he did promptly, and with swift success. He was a natural comedian, establishing a camaraderie with the patrons of burlesque that made him a box-office draw.

It was less wearing on his nose, ears, and chin than boxing, more regular, and in fact, more attractive in every way. The manner that won him friends among the fight patrons served equally well in the theater. Rags had a ready grin, fighting or clowning, which was contagious and accordingly valuable in show business. He made people laugh, and continued to increase American hilarity as a favorite screen comedian until his last breath.

With Russell Trent, Ragland booked for a vaudeville sketch which toured the United States through 1938 and 1939, playing every city and town of consequence. A year earlier he had appeared in the New York show, "Who's Who?" which added considerably to his reputation as a comedian.

When he later went to Hollywood he acquired screen technique without effort by the simple process of continuing to be funny. He acted before the cameras with the same ease that marked his work on the stage, and if the crew laughed he was satisfied.

He was seen in "Whistling in the Dark," which made a star of Red Skelton, another graduate from burlesque, and added laurels to Ragland's record as a laughmaker. Later he appeared in "Ring-side Maisie" and again with Skelton in the film adaptation of "Panama Hattie," before going into the musical "Born to Sing."

His enthusiasm for radio comedians was an example of professional generosity. He listened to all of them, found something funny in the gags of every one—particularly when they used something that he'd sprung on a burlesque stage years ago.

In his home town the folks called him "Johnny Rags." That confused him. He died confused. That's why he contended he was just a "confounded guy."

He was confused about deciding on a profession. "Rags" left school often and early. At fourteen he stopped pretending and stepped from the classroom to a paper route and later into fighting.

After the fights he'd visit cronies in burlesque shows. One night, in Indianapolis, he was in time to replace a second comedian who failed to show up. He donned grease paint, baggy trousers, false nose, and stepped before the footlights for the first time in his life, knowing no more than the bare outlines of the sketches. "Rags" was about six feet tall and weighed 192 pounds. He substituted for a five-by-five clown. In twelve years of burlesque, he learned upward of two thousand sketches, some of them "sixty or seventy years old," he admitted, but he never learned a line from script—not even as a movie actor in "Du Barry Was a Lady." But in that he was the Dauphin of France—Red Skelton's son! What lines could top that?

In New York, besides Toots Shor's, Dinty Moore's was one of Rags' favorite hangouts. There he met Buddy De Sylva and the producer offered to write in a line or two for Rags in "Panama Hattie." By the time the show opened, Rags was the principal of the sailor trio and stole everything but the props. That was Hollywood's cue. Rags repeated his stage success for the screen.

Rags Ragland was destined to become one of the greatest American comedians. His untimely death took from the comedy world a great artist of the slapstick era. Rags was slated by MGM, at the time of his death, for seven pictures a year, a schedule that not even Red Skelton or Jimmy Durante was faced with during their early build-up days at the studio.

Until the day he died, Rags Ragland never stopped thinking about how he could make more people laugh more.

Charles Spencer Chaplin was born in London, England, April 16, 1889. His father was a vocalist and actor, and his mother was known under the stage name of Lily Harley. She had gained quite a reputation for her work in light opera.

Charlie was thrown on his own before he was ten. The early death of his father and subsequent illness of his mother made it necessary for the youngster to find a place for himself in the world.

Charles, together with his brother, Sydney, took to the stage.

The first professional debut of young Charles found him a member of "The Eight Lancashire Lads," with whom he was outstanding as a tap dancer. His pantomimic genius attracted numerous producers, and the years to follow found him much in demand.

When he was about fourteen, he became a member of the cast of "Sherlock Holmes," appearing as "Billy," the page boy, in support of William Gillette. At the close of this engagement, Charlie started a career as a comedian in vaudeville which eventually brought him to the United States. He was then twenty-one. This was in 1910, and he was featured with the Fred Karno Repertoire Company, appearing in nearly every large city in the United States and Canada.

During this tour he won quite a bit of popular favor. His most successful characterization was in a sketch known as "A Night in an English Music Hall." The act, which was under the direction of Alfred Reeves, returned to England in the spring of 1912. In the fall of that year, Chaplin again came to the United States with Reeves. At this time motion-picture magnates were combing the world for picture material.

Fulfilling an engagement in Philadelphia, Chaplin was offered a picture contract. He agreed to appear before the camera at the expiration of his vaudeville tour in November, 1913, and his entrance into the cinema world took place that month, when he joined Mack Sennett and the Keystone Film Company.

His initial salary as a screen player was \$150 a week, but after he had been on the screen and the public had taken to him, other producers started negotiations for his services. At the expiration of his Sennett contract, the Essanay Company made the offer that placed Chaplin under their banner, at a large increase. Brother Sydney arrived from England and took Charlie's place with Keystone.

The following year Charlie was even more in demand. He signed a contract with the Mutual Film Corporation for an even larger sum. With Mutual he made twelve two-reel pictures, "The Floorwalker," "The Fireman," "The Vagabond," "One A.M." (a production in which he was the only character for the entire two

reels, with the exception of the entrance of a cab driver at the opening), "The Count," "The Pawnshop," "Behind the Screen," "The Rink," "Easy Street" (heralded as his greatest production up to that time), "The Cure," "The Immigrant," and "The Adventurer."

After a vacation in Hawaii he entered into an agreement with the First National Exhibitors' Circuit, a new organization specially formed to exploit his pictures.

Early in 1918 Chaplin began a new contract and gave "A Dog's Life" to the amusement world. After this production, he gave his attention, by request of the government, to a tour of the South in the interest of the Third Liberty Loan campaign. Returning to his studios, he made a propaganda film which was used by the government to popularize the Liberty Loan Drive.

His next step was a daring one: the making of a comedy dealing with the war. The production "Shoulder Arms" was released at a most opportune time and brought the greatest commendation from all sides. This he followed with a fantasy, "Sunnyside," then "A Day's Pleasure." Early in 1921, Chaplin startled the world with the presentation of a six-reel masterpiece, "The Kid." This picture also introduced to the screen one of the greatest child players of all times, Jackie Coogan.

After a considerable rest, Charlie released "The Idle Class," a production in which he portrayed a dual character. Following this, Chaplin started another picture. He was at work one day when he decided on a vacation and made a hurried trip to New York, booked passage on the "Olympic," and arrived at Southampton ten days later. Chaplin's return to his homeland that year (1921) was a great event to the British. Never was a single subject accorded such a welcome as this returning "son." Next he visited Paris, where another demonstration was but an echo of what had taken place in England. Then came Berlin, and on and on through Europe went the great funny man.

When he returned to the United States, he teamed with Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, and D. W. Griffith; the United Artists Corporation was formed. Chaplin made five pictures under this arrangement, each of feature length, "A Woman of Paris,"

"The Gold Rush," "The Circus," "City Lights," and "Modern Times."

In February, 1931, almost ten years after his first European trip, Charlie was homesick, so after successfully launching "City Lights" he booked passage for England. Although his arrival in 1921 had been the scene for wild demonstrations and ovations, his reception this time far exceeded the first one. There followed a trip through the English countryside and his subsequent arrival in London, where he was literally mobbed by friends and admirers.

There were delightful dinners with Sir Philip Sassoon in Park Lane, formal gatherings at Lady Astor's in such distinguished company as Bernard Shaw's and Amy Johnson's, lone nocturnal walks through Lambeth, Kensington, and Westminster Bridge Road, where childhood memories were renewed, a visit to Old Bailey, and Wandsworth Gaol, where Oscar Wilde had been confined, a quiet week end with Allister MacDonald and his father, Ramsey MacDonald, the British Prime Minister, luncheons with Princess Bibesco, Randolph Churchill, Lord Birkenhead, Lloyd George, his never-forgotten journey to the workhouse school which he and his brother Sydney had attended as small boys, intellectual chats with his old friend, Thomas Burke, stimulating talks with Winston Churchill. Then, the London opening of "City Lights."

It was a brilliant premiere. Charlie was host to Bernard Shaw, Winston Churchill, most of the cream of London aristocracy, and many of his friends of humbler days.

After the premiere Charlie felt the need of a change, so his itinerary included a tour of Holland en route to Berlin. All during his journey he was acclaimed and feted, and in Berlin his reception was overwhelming—in marked contrast to his first visit there, when, because of the war and the infrequent releases of his pictures, he was almost unknown.

Having tasted the beauties and charms of Venice, Paris called. Meetings with M. Briand and impromptu talks on politics and economics, a visit with Alfred Jackson, with whom Charlie was associated as a boy, an audience with the King of Belgium, then on to Normandy for a boar hunt with the Duke of Westminster. All this Chaplin most humorously describes in his book, *A Comedian*

Sees the World, an interesting volume published serially in *The Woman's Home Companion*, which joined the comedian to the ranks of the highest-paid authors. He received one dollar a word. It ran to fifty thousand words. In it are to be found his ideas, philosophy, and experiences—dealt with poignantly, humorously, philosophically. It presented the world-famous comedian in a hitherto unknown light.

Charlie next moved to the south of France, where he was joined by his brother Sydney and family. At the presentation of "City Lights" in Monte Carlo, the Prince of Monaco and the Duke of Connaught were his guests of honor. The Frank Goulds gave a formal dinner party to which were bidden Maeterlinck, Marchand, Doumergue, and the distinguished biographer, Emil Ludwig, who later invited Charlie to a luncheon, where they discussed philosophy and the arts. It was one of Charlie's most memorable experiences, he says. Grasse beckoned, and there he was the guest of H. G. Wells.

The distance from Monte Carlo to Algeria is long, but Algeria was the comedian's next destination. To his utter astonishment, even in this far-off country the name of Chaplin drew thousands of film fans. They lined the road all the way to his hotel. Social activities played little part in Charlie's sojourn here, for he devoted the entire time to a study of the Arabs and their country.

Back in England Charlie dined at the House of Commons, had a much-publicized interview with Mahatma Gandhi, talked long and fervently with Lytton Strachey, Aldous Huxley, Augustus John, and other brilliant men whom he admired.

Before leaving, he decided to tour the north of England and study the economic conditions. En route he stopped over at Stratford-on-Avon, spent a night in Manchester, and visited Blackburn, where he had toured as a boy in repertory companies, and after a flying trip back to London, started on his trip to the Orient.

Cairo he found disappointing, but at Colombo, the capital of Ceylon, he reveled in the Singhalese ceremonials, their processions and native dances, and was loath to leave, but Singapore, with its colorful Malay, Hindu, and Chinese populations, beckoned.

In Java, he found much of interest, but it was the Dutch colon-

ization there that impressed him most. But of all the countries that enthralled him, his most enchanting memories were those of Bali. He delved deep into the history of the country, its religion, philosophy, art, ceremonial rites, and customs. When he finally returned to the United States at the conclusion of his trip, he brought crates of art objects, paintings, masks, and recordings of their weirdly beautiful music, together with reels of the Balinese photographed at their daily tasks and at their festivals.

Japan was the last lap of his long journey. His arrival in Kobe was the signal for perhaps the biggest demonstration of his entire career. A guest of the Japanese government, he was feted royally.

Charlie had always been interested in the Japanese theater, and while in Tokyo attended several performances which impressed him tremendously. Here, too, he studied the economic system of the Japanese, the diametrically opposed conditions and life of the Easterner as compared to the Westerner.

Finally Charlie booked passage for home. Arriving in Seattle, he was greeted by a crowd of newspapermen who invited him to write a lengthy treatise on the economic conditions of the world. This article, advocating the United States' departure from the gold standard, appeared throughout the world, causing widespread comment, and its publication preceded President Roosevelt's action taking America off the gold standard.

His next picture, "Modern Times," was a Chaplin tour de force, but typical of him. Not only was he the sole author, but he directed, starred, supervised, and cut the entire film. Released in February, 1936, the picture was the biggest grosser of that year, taking in one million dollars.

Charles Chaplin is without a doubt the person who has gained most international fame in the amusement world, whether it be stage or screen.

A lover of music, he is an accomplished musician, playing equally well the violin, piano, organ, accordion—in fact, most instruments—though he has never taken a lesson, nor can he read music. He personally arranges or composes the musical scores of his pictures, and has written and published dozens of songs, among

them, "Sing a Song," "With You, Dear, in Bombay," and "There's Always One You Can't Forget."

The era of Charlie Chaplin has not ended by any manner or means. He has made two very important pictures in recent years: "The Great Dictator" in 1940 and "Monsieur Verdoux" in 1947, both of which he wrote and directed.

One proof of Chaplin's ability as a great comedian is the fact that his picture "City Lights" still plays on Broadway.

When Harold Lloyd faced the cameras after a seven-year vacation, it was something of an accident.

Lloyd, who made "The Freshman," "Grandma's Boy," "Safety Last," and other of filmdom's classic comedies, temporarily gave up acting—but not pictures—back in 1938.

When Preston Sturges and Howard Hughes formed California Pictures Corporation they found themselves with two comedy properties on their hands. Sturges planned to direct as well as write and produce one of them. For the second, he needed a certain type of comedy director.

Sturges knew that Lloyd had never directed, but knew also that the comedian was just the man to handle the script. During a series of conferences, Sturges idly inquired if Lloyd had ever thought of returning to the screen.

"I've thought of it," Lloyd confessed. "I've constantly been looking for a story with a character similar to that I used to play."

And that's how "The Sin of Harold Diddlebock" was born. Sturges had an idea. Lloyd like it. They developed it. Sturges wrote the script, and directed the man he wanted for a director.

"The Sin of Harold Diddlebock" (released as "Mad Wednesday") was Lloyd's sixteenth feature-length picture. But he is also remembered throughout the world for his numerous one- and two-reel comedies. His career was one that saw him work his way from the very bottom to the top.

Lloyd was born in Burchard, Nebraska. The family lived in such Nebraska communities as Beatrice, Pawnee City, and Omaha. It was in the latter city that Lloyd's theatrical career began, when he was little more than twelve years old. John Lane Connor, the

leading man with the Burwood Stock Company, selected young Harold for the role of Little Abe, the lame youngster in "Tess of the D'Urbervilles." While Harold wasn't exactly a sensation, several other parts followed.

In 1913, Lloyd's father was awarded two thousand dollars in an accident damage suit, and the Lloyd family decided that this could be invested wisely in a possible theatrical career for Harold. He went to San Diego, where John Lane Connor had established a dramatic school.

Lloyd attended San Diego High School, studied with and assisted Connor, and helped his dad in the combination restaurant-and-billiard-parlor which he had opened. Eventually Lloyd toured the state with a stock company, playing leads, staging, managing, and taking character roles, for which his ability at make-up made him an expert.

When the Edison Company came to San Diego on location for scenes in famed Balboa Park, Lloyd made his film debut as an extra, playing an Indian.

Lloyd didn't become movie-struck with that start, but when the going got tough in San Diego he decided to try his talents in Hollywood. As is usual in these success stories, he never got by the studio gateman. That is, until standing outside the gates at the old Universal studio one day, he noticed that the noontime extras got by the portals with no trouble at all because of their make-up.

The next day he arrived with a make-up kit, donned some grease paint behind a signboard, and at noon wandered inside. He was soon working fairly regularly.

One chap he met on "Samson and Delilah" was a young man named Hal Roach who had producer ambitions. They became friends, and when Roach was bequeathed a few thousand dollars, he decided to strike out on his own. Lloyd was the first player he signed to do leads and comedy roles.

"Willie Work" was Lloyd's first comedy character, a non-descript fellow with a catlike mustache, baggy pants, broad-shouldered coat, and tiny hat. In short, a combination of some of the popular comedians of the day.

From that he developed "Lonesome Luke," who became such a hit that Pathé, then a leading distributing agency, contracted for all the films that Roach could produce. Lloyd, however, didn't like the idea of being typed. He made a lot of "Luke" for a few years, in one- and two-reel form, then hit on the idea of just being himself with the addition of a pair of horn-rimmed glasses.

What he did with that prop should have won an award for Harold from the Optometrists' League, if there is such a thing. Those horn-rimmed specs became famous the world over.

So did Lloyd, for that matter, and the company "proudly presented" him as the star of two-reel comedies that cost \$125,000. At least that's the way they were billed.

It was during this time that Harold starred with Mildred Davis. In 1923 he married her.

From the \$125,000 comedies Lloyd expanded to a three-reel titanic called "Never Weaken." It was so successful that he jumped to four reels with "A Sailor Made Man." And then he really became a pioneer in the industry by making a full-length comedy, complete with a real story, at a cost of \$2,000,000. The picture was "Grandma's Boy," and in its way is as important a milestone in the industry as "The Birth of a Nation." It proved comedy not only was here to stay, at eight reels or more, but that it was highly profitable, too.

After that, in order, Lloyd produced and starred in such well-remembered films as "Dr. Jack," "Safety Last," "Why Worry?" "The Freshman," "Girl Shy," "The Kid Brother," "For Heaven's Sake," and "Speedy," all silent pictures.

Lloyd was in the process of making "Welcome Danger" when sound hit the screen. He switched over to the new medium and followed that one with "Feet First," "Movie Crazy," "The Cat's Paw," "The Milky Way," and "Professor Beware." Lloyd later turned producer for such pictures as "A Girl, A Guy and a Gob" and "My Favorite Spy."

He has a marvelous collection of books on entomology, archeology, painting, and sculpture; a huge collection of microscopes; and a squadron of old automobiles, none of which he ever trades in when he buys a new one.

Harold Lloyd has utilized the situation and the prop for his mastery of comedy through the years. In the early days when he wore horn-rimmed glasses, the glasses denoted weakness and gave the audience a feeling of sympathy for a weak character. When they saw Harold walking on the edge of a building many floors above the sidewalk this sympathy and weakness was magnified many times and the situation became funnier.

A sure giveaway as a comedian, even in private life he never stops clowning. He and a friend worked up a rather zany mind-reading act which they present to friends, and with which they toured the hospitals during the war years.

Like Chaplin, Harold Lloyd too has lived through more than one generation of admirers. "Mad Wednesday" proves to many a flash-in-the-pan comedian what the Grand Old Dads *really* are.

Joe Laurie, Jr., says they named Durante Jimmy because the boys in the block would use his nose to open doors, windows, and safes—he's probably the only guy in the world who has a copyright on his nose.

Laurie also claims the days of Jimmy's primary education were the palmiest days of his ignorance. . . . He was called the Grand Old Man of Public School No. 1. . . .

Jimmy knew his *p*'s and *q*'s, but none of the rest of the alphabet. He had a musical background because his old man used to spank him with a guitar. Jimmy used to play on a comb with tissue paper over it and in those days both he and the comb had teeth. The neighborhood would get up parties just not to invite him.

While Jimmy was recording a musical number on the set of "Two Sisters from Boston," one musician struck a particularly sour note. "You can't get away wit dat," Jimmy warned him. "Your union ain't dat strong!"

Jimmy was one of the first fun-provokers to be nominated for the Humor Hall of Fame, sponsored by the National Laugh Week Foundation, which, in turn is sponsored by The Gag Writers Protective Association, which in turn . . .

Speaking of predictions (and who was?), on May 11, 1931,

Walter Winchell wrote, "The trio [Clayton, Jackson, and Durante], after a long career, is melting because of a movie agreement made for and by Durante. But there are many who believe that someday soon they will again be reunited. Public demand will bring that about, you may safely wager." It took fifteen years and an act of MGM to make the prediction come true. Then Clayton went along as manager and agent.

"Jimmy Durante is a very friendly guy," an admirer says. "He even shakes hands with doorknobs . . . only drunks call him Mister and only deaf people never heard of him. . . . He was a wac long before the Army had the idea."

Jimmy played piano in many clubs, including Chinatown's Chatham Club. Then in 1916 he organized a five-piece Dixieland combination for the Club Alamo in Harlem. The small band clicked and moved down to midtown Broadway. Meantime Jimmy met Eddie Jackson, one-time singing waiter, and Lou Clayton, a dancer, and in 1923 the famed partnership of Clayton, Jackson, and Durante was formed.

After success in many night clubs, the trio crashed Broadway in style in "Ziegfeld's Show Girls" in 1928, and the following year Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur wrote a screenplay for them called "Roadhouse Nights," filmed in New York City. In 1931, the trio made their last hilarious appearance together in the revue, "The New Yorkers."

Jimmy had had many solo picture offers but declined to break up the trio until the depression hit show business. That year he went to Hollywood.

Jimmy's oversized nose is his trademark. He's extremely careful of the "schnozzola," so careful, in fact that he has taken out a copyright on it.

Once Jimmy and Gary Moore, whose humor is as bristling as his cropped hair, teamed up successfully to become leading exponents in the field of madness and mirth.

Junior, as Moore was fondly addressed by Schnozzola, zoomed to fame on the air with effervescent gags, droll monologues, and zany antics, all of which perfectly complemented the sputtering naïve comedy of the distraught Jimmy. 'Twould be gilding the

nose to reiterate the details of Durante's long career in the entertainment world—suffice it to say that he's delighted the audiences of two generations on stage, screen, and radio. Now he has conquered the newest and perhaps most difficult medium of them all—television.

The tales of Umbriago have been numerous. At one time J. D. reported that Umbriago had discovered a new medicine that makes you feel great.

"It's called Doctor Hiccup's Magic Pick-up. You take a few drops of this medicine and first you hiccup and then you pickup."

"What do you pickup?" asked mystified Gary.

"Your hat—it falls off when you hiccup."

"Umbriago is driving me to bedlam," confided Jimmy to his partner.

"Now what's he done?"

"What's he done? He just lost his best girl friend to an Irishman on account of incompatibility."

"Incompatibility?"

"Yeah. Umbriago and his girl were necking in the living room—when in come Pat and he had more ability."

On one of his radio shows Jimmy swore he overheard the following conversation between two roaches. Said the first: "I just came from the most amazing place, a new restaurant that is the cleanest place I've ever seen. It's spotless. Not a speck on the floor, the walls, the tables or—"

"Please stop talking like that," said the second, "can't you see that I'm eating?"

The Nose once asked an actress in Hollywood for a date and was turned down with an emphatic "no" . . . "And that proves that you don't have to be a photographer to get a pretty girl's negative," was Durante's fast quip.

Durante told Gary that he hitchhiked a ride on a wagon of oranges, and added that he looked very cute sitting on top of those oranges in his yachting cap.

"Yachting cap?" queried Gary.

"Sure," said Jimmy, "they were navel oranges."

Hailed as one of the theater's truly great comedians, Bobby Clark made his first appearance without Paul McCullough in an early edition of the "Ziegfeld Follies."

By that time the team of Clark and McCullough had joined the peerless combinations of Montgomery and Stone, McIntyre and Heath, and Weber and Fields.

From the beginning of the thirty-year partnership, there was never any question about who was to be the comic, and who the straight-man. Clark rolled them in the aisles with his antics. As boys Clark and McCullough practiced tumbling tricks, intending to run away and join a circus. In 1905 the youths made some money appearing in a Y.M.C.A. show, and their native Springfield, Ohio, saw the last of them. They soon got a job with one of the many minstrel companies then touring the country. A clog dance in the first act and acrobatics in the "olio" were their contributions.

The circus remained their first love, however, and the next season Clark and McCullough were with the Hagenback-Wallace Show. Here the partners learned to paint comedy with the broad strokes of the slap-stick clown. This training in the ancient art of pantomime stands Bobby in as good stead in the "Follies" of today as it did in his pinfeather days thirty years ago.

After more minstrel work, Clark and McCullough made their first appearance in New York at the old Madison Square Garden.

"We first achieved a measure of recognition in the famous Culhane, Chace, and Weyson's Minstrel Show," Clark explained. "We were billed as 'comedy acrobats and bugle players' and got a joint salary of twenty-five dollars a week. That wouldn't have been so bad—considering the times and our ages, twelve-fifty a week and expenses was pretty good. It wouldn't have been so bad if we weren't always getting framed for breaking the rules. Fines for breaking the rules ranged all the way from one dollar for wearing muddy shoes in the parade to five dollars for mashing within two blocks of the theater or hotel."

Clark chuckled as he recalled that even the most virtuous member of the troupe could depend on being framed on an average of two violations a week.

The next advancement was a venture into vaudeville with a dumb act using heavy tramp make-up. It was a pleasant surprise to discover that it was possible to get laughs without breaking their backs. The act was gradually developed into a standard talking comic with some singing thrown in. They invented the line, "We don't sing good, but we sing loud."

Trained as low comedians, slapstick was always the basis of their comedy. Exaggerated make-up and costume, and frantic physical action, such as chases and fights, were what they built their comic situations on. They also invented a burlesque of the shabbily genteel. This original comic premise has so much appeal, and lends itself so well to change and improvement, that it has served them for more than twenty-five years. Clark has found Dickens a great source in his hunt for material on down-at-the-heel gentility.

For several years the team alternated between vaudeville and burlesque. Burlesque was the great finishing school for low comedians, and Clark rose from it to the musical comedy and revue stage where he's been going strong ever since. Recently he, too, scored in television.

Bobby Clark pointed out while playing at the Winter Garden in Mike Todd's "As the Girls Go" that he really doesn't know what makes people laugh. He realizes that making people laugh, however, is a serious business and a necessary one.

Bobby has been in show business over forty-five years and he should know, if anyone does.

There was sadness in homes all over America on August 15, 1935. That was the day Will Rogers crashed in Alaska with well-known pilot Wiley Post. He had said in confiding tones to his radio audience, "Got to see that Alaska."

Headlines of every major newspaper in the country carried the tragic story. Every radio network interrupted its regularly scheduled program to tell of the beloved humorist's death. National

magazines regearred their issues to tell the story of his life, and statesmen, royalty, and dignitaries the world over bowed their heads in reverence and remembrance to the Ambassador of Good Will.

Will Rogers' kindly, homely face, his hesitant manner of speech, his homespun but sage philosophy, won him the regard of beggars and kings. He was a man at home with everyone, he was a man loved by all of America. A part of the theater since childhood, he brought a loving, humorous warmth to radio and films, and he gave columnists a lesson in talking to people straight from the shoulder without talking down to them.

A cowboy hat, a lariat, chewing gum, a warm, drawling voice, and an ineffable grin were the Rogers props. He didn't elicit screaming laughter. People smiled with him, for his humor was of the calmer, gentle variety. Of jokes Will Rogers said: "I like one where you nudge your friend and say 'He's right about that.' I'd rather have you do that than have you laugh and then forget the next minute what you laughed at."

The most frequently quoted man of his day, Will Rogers had some gentle rib poking for every current news topic. America devoured his words. "A joke don't have to be near as funny," he said, "if it's up to date."

Will became a traveler when he was a young man, spending several years in the Argentine and South Africa. Attaining fame after he joined the Ziegfeld Follies, he shortly thereafter settled into some real world traveling. Wherever he went, the spokesman for America was received with open arms. He talked with Kings, Presidents, Ambassadors, and Chancellors, and people everywhere said, "If you want to know what America is like, study Will Rogers."

Vaudeville, traveling shows, radio, columns, and such movies as "Happy Days," "Ambassador Bill," "Down to Earth," and "State Fair" were in the Will Rogers background. He made America smile at itself for many years and when he died he left a tradition as yet unmatched by any other comedian or humorist.

Several years ago Fred Allen played "absolutely" his last

radio appearance and took a vacation for a year. But it didn't work just then, for radio fans wanted Fred and the comedian couldn't resist them. A natural born enemy of pretense and the stuffed-shirt school, Fred, instead of denouncing what he disapproves of in loud tones, ridicules with gags delivered in the slow nasal voice that is his particular distinction.

Allen was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on May 31, 1894. As a small boy he worked in the Boston Public Library for twenty cents an hour. In the library he ran across a book on juggling. That book was *Kismet* bound in leather. He took up the art and after months of arduous practice tried out in an amateur contest in a Boston theater. He was very bad. One night a theater manager heckled him. "Where'd you learn to juggle?" he asked. "I took a correspondence course in baggage smashing," was Fred's retort. The audience howled and the joke was on the manager.

"Ultimately," Fred now admits, "the joke was on me though, because I decided to become a comedian."

For years Allen played the old-time vaudeville circuits, even making a tour of Australia. During World War I he served in the A.E.F. He first appeared on Broadway in the "Passing Show of 1922" at the Winter Garden. Later he appeared as monologist and comedian in "The Little Show" and "Three's a Crowd."

Fred started in radio in 1932, and had the first program that introduced amateurs. At least one of the favorite Allen's Alley characters dates back almost to the beginning, *Minerva Pious*, better known as "Mrs. Nussbaum."

Portland Hoffa, who became Mrs. Fred Allen when Fred came back after the war, also became part of his radio comedy. Portland, named for the Oregon city where she was born, admired Fred above all men. Although she started her life in the West, she went to school in Jamaica, New York, and in her early teens joined George White's "Scandals."

Fred was visiting backstage when he and Portland met, and he admits it was her unusual name that first attracted him. "Hello, Mr. Allen," said Portland when they were introduced. "Why Portland?" asked Fred, meaning, "Where'd you get the monicker?" Portland told him about the Oregon city of the same name, and

that her parents had liked it. So did Fred. And he still does, after all these years.

Fred Allen was quoted in *Life* as saying that "television is nothing like vaudeville. In vaudeville you had one act and a constantly changing audience. You used a routine in Philadelphia one week and you used it again in Wilkes-Barre the next week. You could work it into a state of perfection. Television, like radio, is just the opposite. You have the same audience all the time, so the act must be changed after each performance. Naturally, the quality of the material gets low." Nevertheless, it's pretty safe to say that Allen will have, eventually, a home on TV as he did on radio.

Allen hit the top in radio when he and Tallulah Bankhead did a take-off on the husband-and-wife radio formula. Here are Allen's antics on this one:

FRED: Ahhh! What coffee! What aromatic fragrance! It must be . . .

TALLULAH: You're right, lovey! It's McKeester's Vita-Fresh Coffee, the coffee with that locked-up goodness for everybody—grind or drip. Peach fuzz, you've spilled some on your vest.

FRED: Goody. Now I can try some of that Little Panther Spot Remover. No rubbing.

TALLULAH: And, imagine, a big two-ounce bottle for only 35 cents!

FRED: Or, if you are a messy eater, you can get the handy, economical forty-gallon vat. . . .Your hair is breath-taking. That sheen! That brilliance! What did you do to it?

TALLULAH: I just did what so many society women are doing these days. I went to Madame Yvonne's Hairdo Heaven at 424 Madison Avenue—in the loft.

FRED: It's divine, bunny fluff.

TALLULAH: Madame Yvonne uses a sensational hairdressing. It contains that mystery ingredient—chicken fat.

FRED: I hear it's on sale at all the cut-rate cigar stores. (Jasha, the canary, twitters.)

TALLULAH: Ah, little Jasha is so happy, so carefree. And why shouldn't he be happy?

FRED: Yes, he knows that the newspaper on the bottom of his bird cage is New York's leading daily, *The Morning Record*—thirty-two columnists, eighteen pages of comics, and all the news no other newspaper sees fit to print.

TALLULAH: Excuse me, apple honey. I have a letter here from Mrs. T. S. Button, of Molehole, Idaho. Mrs. Button had a splitting headache for forty years until she heard about Pepso-Bepito on our program.

FRED: Only Pepso is guaranteed to fizz twice. Once before you drink it and once after.

CHILD'S VOICE: Good morning, Mumsy and Daddy.

FRED: Why, it's our little three-year-old daughter, Amber.

TALLULAH: Isn't she cute? Amber, I just love the way your tooth is shining this morning.

AMBER: Yes, I brushed it with Dr. Pratt's Homogenized Tooth-paste.

FRED: Ha. Ha. Ha

TALLULAH: What are you laughing at, love duck?

FRED: I just thought how witty Oscar Levant was last night when he poured that bottle of catsup over Jim Farley's head.

TALLULAH: And wasn't Mr. Farley a good sport? He just sat there grinning and smacking his lips!

FRED: You, too, will smack your lips if you taste Klotnick's Concentrated Catsup—the only catsup that bears the *Hobo News* seal of approval.

After a bit more of this cheerful patter Fred and Tallulah decided to put a little realism into their early-morning conversation. On one of their grouchy mornings the program sounds like this:

TALLULAH: Hey Knucklehead, get out of that bed. We've got a program to do.

FRED: Six o'clock in the morning. Who's up to listen to us—a couple of garbage collectors and some burglars?

TALLULAH: If you want to go back to hustling gardenias in front of Childs, go right ahead. (*Jasha twitters.*)

FRED: Shut up! I thought I told you to give that canary some of Dr. Groober's Bird Seed.

TALLULAH: I did. Now Jasha is the only canary in the country with an ulcer. What's in the mail today, chowderhead?

FRED: A summons. Someone took that Pepso-Bepeto and dropped dead. Where do you find these sponsors—at a police line-up?

AMBER: Good morning, Mumsy and Daddy! (Allen slaps her and she howls.)

FRED: Sneaking up on your parents with that one tooth like an old elk. Little Amber!

TALLULAH: I told you we should have finished reading the book before we named her.

I'm afraid our time is up, as they say on the air. There was lots more of it and it was all hilarious and so thought breakfast-couple audiences the country over.

"In the past twenty years," Jack Benny said in a radio fan magazine, "American humor—accelerated by radio—has come out of the barnyard.

"It has been cleaned up, perfumed, and sparked by those unsung heroes, the gagwriters. Today the ether is so full of good gags that even the ghosts have hysterics.

"I will go out on the limb to say that radio has done for American humor in ten years what it would have taken vaudeville fifty years to do. I feel no heartaches over vaudeville's passing, when I think of the way the old-time comic used to get his belly laughs. Gags were in their infancy then. They were as unsteady as a baby—and had to be changed just as often. A comedian used to throw a gag at a vaudeville audience with a swing and a prayer, never knowing whether it would roll 'em in the aisle—or roll up the joint."

Little Benny Kubelsky was an 1894 Valentine for a Chicago hospital. His mother was brought to Chicago for the special event from Waukegan. Little Benny grew up to be NBC's comedy star, Jack Benny.

As a small child Jack became a violin student and in spite of today's radio gags was considered the child prodigy of Waukegan. While still in his teens he became the youngest member of the pit

orchestra there. In high school he added membership in the school dance orchestra to his other projects, and after receiving his diploma was ready for vaudeville when he teamed up with the theater pianist for a tour.

Jack Benny became well known in the vaudeville circuits, and his Navy career in World War I is familiar to millions of American radio listeners. Experience entertaining fellow servicemen had proved to Jack that using his violin as a prop and his flair for comedy as the mainstay of his act paid off in popularity. Thus it was a suave comedian who went back to vaudeville in well-cut civilian clothes.

Not long after his marriage to Mary Livingstone in 1927, Jack began to make a successful picture career when he appeared in one of the earliest film musicals, "The Hollywood Revue." An historic appearance on Ed Sullivan's radio program in 1932 netted him a radio contract as star on his own show. The Benny discoveries, the early commercial kidding on the show, as well as its format, have become milestones in radio. However, the Benny formula was hardly new. The cast, with the high-pitched tenor, the raucous bandleader, the innocent and persistent announcer, the dumb girlfriend, the wisecracking servant, and the straight-faced stooges are all from the old tried and tested school of vaudeville comedy.

January 12 is a red-letter day in Benny's life, for it was the day of his marriage to Sadye Marks of Los Angeles, known on the air as Mary Livingstone. Sadye, or Mary, was no comedienne, but now she seems to have caught the bug and appears with Jack, even occasionally in pictures.

The comedian once wrote all of his own gags, but now that he is occupied with both radio and the screen, he has hired such writers as Bill Morrow, Ed Beloin, and Sam Perrin to work with him.

Jack says his radio rehearsals are the worst in the world. If they were good, he claims, he would be worried about his regular broadcast. He hates to rehearse a program more than once because it loses its punch.

Benny is reputed to be one of the best-dressed men in Hollywood. He is rarely seen without a cigar, although he has cut his daily

quota down considerably from the twenty he once used to smoke.

His favorite film role is always his latest.

His radio "feud" with Fred Allen is probably the most famous of its kind in the world. They are, of course, good friends.

"You can't change a leopard's spots—and you can't change the style of a top comedian," Jack Benny will tell you. "Radio audiences are funny," Benny insists. "They fall in love with a comedian because he's a particular type of character on the air—or has a certain style of delivery. And that's the way they want him. Let him change that style or format and I'm afraid he'll miss his listeners. I'm sure that every one of these fellows will be back to their old style in a short time.

"Bob Hope is a great comedian and so is Fred Allen, but let Hope do a show like Allen's—or vice versa—and I bet they'd both suffer. Listeners want the Hope they know and the Allen they know. Their peculiar and inimitable style of delivery has caught on and made them great radio stars.

"Yes, these radio listeners are a peculiar lot. There are some comedians whom I think are wonderful, as do audiences in night clubs and in the theater. But when they get on the air, they just don't get over. I can't explain it but what kills audiences in the night clubs often gets yawns from the radio fans.

"Every once in a while I think I'd like to change my radio character, but I feel that a lot of my listeners would tune off if I did. I remember once I did a series on 'Buck Benny Rides Again' and did it so often I got sick of it. When a few letters from fans came in agreeing with me, I stopped using it. Immediately thousands of letters poured in bawling me out for dropping 'Buck Benny.'

"So watch all the programs that that try to change their format and see if they don't quickly return to their old tried-and-true formula. That's what the listeners want—and without listeners, the sponsor doesn't want you, no matter how funny you may be."

Now, after almost twenty years on NBC, he is still playing the stingy, balding Benny, assisted by the sarcastic Mary Livingstone, the loud Phil Harris, flip Rochester, mother's boy Dennis Day, and fat Don Wilson, who lives to sell his product.

Jack Benny told Margaret Arlen in a CBS interview before his television debut that he felt about TV the way he felt about radio—you never know whether or not the audience is yours until the show has begun.

Benny took his early television audience the way he has taken every audience he has ever met—with a laugh.

One of the truest Horatio Alger stories in America is that of Eddie Cantor—the orphan boy from New York's Lower East Side. As a great star of radio and screen, Eddie Cantor is familiar to literally every person in the United States and in many other countries.

Born in New York City, January 31, 1893, Eddie doesn't remember his mother or violinist father, both of whom died when he was only two. His education was far from conventional, as he left grammar school by request and never went back.

The ambitious youngster, growing up in the crowded tenement district, began to sing on street corners and soon developed a talent for mimicry. His first public performance was in the old Bowery Theater, where he won the first prize of five dollars one Amateur Night in 1909.

As he grew up Eddie Cantor tried a lot of jobs but decided the stage was the only work he could ever be happy in. There followed jobs as singing waiter, third-rate acts in second-rate vaudeville, and, finally, small parts in musicals. A few such parts and Eddie Cantor became a vaudeville star—before long, a musical comedy star. Eddie went on to radio and television and film fame. With the advent of quizmasters, Cantor found his spot even in this category.

Eddie Cantor cannot be called a great comedian. He is a great artist. A great American. A great guy, but not a great comic. He fancies the simple style of minstrel joke; through the years as head of one of the leading variety shows on radio, he worked this type of gag comedy to the delight of millions. His blackface routines started after he had completed a circuit of theaters around New York. He accidentally discovered that if he blackened his face like a minstrel man, he could play the entire circuit again!

His ubiquitous gags about his five daughters and his wife, Ida, were turned into a million or more bits of homey humor. Eddie was one of the first radio stars to incorporate serious messages into a comedy program. In 1936 he originated the March of Dimes which was based on the notion that people are thrilled to send donations for an important charity to the President of the United States.

Since 1920 the Cantor name has played second billing to none. His innovations brought new life to radio programs, and his jokes, laughter to America. He has received many awards for his humanitarian work, and has recently been made a Doctor of Humane Letters by Temple University—surely, a “first” for the comedian.

W. C. Fields was one of the finest natural comics this nation has produced, yet he had few gags worth retelling. His humor derived almost completely from expression, attitudes, and the indolent, irresistible inflection in his speech.

Throughout his professional career, which began when he was eleven—playing parks and carnivals as a juggler—he turned virtually every experience into comedy, on stage and off.

During the seventh edition of Earl Carroll’s *Vanities*, Eddie Diamond, stage manager, nearly dropped dead when Dorothy Knapp tripped on stage and all but knocked over a skyscraper setting. Her opening line was the cue for Fields to enter and Diamond was afraid it would ruin his scene.

Fields strode on and ad-libbed in his slow-paced drawl.

“They don’t put these buildings up the way they used to.” It tossed the customers in the aisle.

Fields took nothing seriously. A few hours before he died, he clowned with his nurse, although he was scarcely able to gasp. Legends abound about him, some true, some false, but he never took the trouble to deny or affirm any of them. Indeed, the exact year of his birth is not known, but it was probably 1879 or 1880, in Philadelphia. He was born Claude William Dunkenfield, which he shortened to Fields while transposing his initials.

His early life is misty, but an old trouper, eighty-five-year-old

Jack Murphy, knew him well, and his version is probably more accurate than any other one.

According to Murphy, Fields' father kept a poolroom in Philadelphia. It was a hideaway for the lad, who was in no favor at home. One summer night he went to a lawn party. The yard was full of fruit trees and Fields was surprised when he snagged a few apples to see how easy it was to juggle them.

He went around pestering everybody with exhibitions of his new-found talent. Soon afterward he brawled with his father and left home, taking up residence in a boiler in a vacant lot. Boys in the neighborhood brought him food.

He got hold of some wooden balls, a cane, and a battered plug hat, and practiced juggling hours on end. He made himself an Inverness out of an old cape, fashioned some whiskers out of bits of fur, pasted them to his face, and booked himself in a couple of Pennsylvania parks.

Later he booked a circuit of parks operated by Grant and Flynn in New England—Lynn, Lowell, Lawrence—all Massachusetts towns. After the park season Fields went into burlesque and then on to vaudeville. All this time his was a silent act, and all this time he was developing the art which made him a headliner not only in America but in Europe as well.

His first speaking part probably was with McIntyre and Heath in "The Ham Tree," the musical those blackface comics expanded from their vaudeville act. For several years Fields continued his juggling, but gradually abandoned it for comedy roles with lines.

When vaudeville waned Fields' fortunes were low. He tried a few silent pictures without success. Actually it was Gene Buck, Flo Ziegfeld's talent man, who was responsible for Fields' rebirth in the theater—and by an incredible circumstance.

A musical, "Watch Your Step," was booked to open a tryout tour in Rochester, and its producer, long before the tour opened, sought Fields for his show. Fields was then touring Australia and a cable was sent to him.

Eager to return to the States, he boarded the next ship, and after a forty-nine-day voyage reached San Francisco and took a

train to Rochester. He arrived in time for the show; was heart-breakingly dismissed after his first night's performance.

But Gene Buck caught his act and signed him for the Follies. Fields starred with Ziegfeld for seven years. In 1922, he played in George White's "Scandals" and the following year starred in his own show, "Poppy." D. W. Griffith later made this into a movie called "Sally of the Sawdust," starring Fields.

After that picture, Fields wrote his own ticket in entertainment. One of his happiest tenures was with Paramount, which gave him carte blanche to write his own stories and act in them the way he wanted to. It was a wise move. But his rebellion at sticking to the script of radio shows made advertising executives and sponsors more than a little nervous.

In later years Fields made successful film appearances in "You Can't Cheat an Honest Man," "My Little Chickadee," and "Sensations of 1945." But they were sporadic efforts. Although irresponsible in his conduct, a free and easily likable man, Fields was by no means a spendthrift, and a few years before his death he told friends he had a considerable bank balance, supposedly \$700,000.

In 1944 Fields broke his well-known and prominent bottle nose, one of his comic assets. "Did it on the edge of a martini glass," he explained.

Back in the days when he was trying to break into Hollywood, he and Max Sennett played golf at the Lakeside course. Every time they played Fields managed to inject this remark, "You know, Max, I ought to be playing at that studio of yours." One day Sennett said, "That's not a bad idea, Bill." Fields said, "I'll do anything, write, produce direct—anything." But he didn't mention acting. When Fields showed up at the studio after some conversation with Sennett, in which he asked many questions regarding Sennett's solvency, Fields said that he wanted to write his own contract. Sennett allowed him to, and the historical articles were signed.

While the relationship between these two became very stormy and quarrelsome, many of their funniest short movies were made

in this period, among them "The Chemist" and "The Fatal Glass of Beer." At one point Fields even broke his neck, for Keystone comedies required wild and frantic action. Incidentally, Fields made \$5,000 a week while he worked for Sennett. It was then he began to be an institution in American theater.

Although in his later years Fields started his day off with two double martinis before breakfast, he abhorred drunks and never in any way showed effects from his heavy drinking. He carried an oversized cocktail shaker full of martinis to the studios. Drinking, he believed, sharpened his good humor and enhanced his appreciation of California and the climate he dearly loved.

Ed Wynn was on the vaudeville stage for thirty years before he took to the air.

Then he put on the "Fire Chief" program. People thought the guy was crazy. A man of his age beginning a new career! It seemed "The Perfect Fool" was being a perfect fool.

Now Ed Wynn has launched still another career. How many will stand up and shake their heads in horror at that! Ed Wynn is going into television. Ed makes every middle-aged character who thinks life is over at sixty look pretty silly. But then, that's his job, he's a comedian.

Radio as such was never Ed's forte—he had to be seen to be appreciated. He needed his props along. "I got by in radio," he quips—"and they never saw me at all."

The television people never saw him at all either. But they hired him. To the tune of a \$10,000-a-week show, too. That included Wynn, his three-hundred funny coats, eight-hundred hats, and all the pantomime talent he could offer. That's plenty.

Ed had trouble with television at first. When the cameras lost him, they could always focus beyond the footlights. That was their boy down there with the audience. That was their boy forgetting the scope of a camera. There were three generations of audience down there, grandparents, children, and their parents.

The pantomiming genius began in show business when he was fifteen. He ran away from his Norwich, Connecticut, home

and joined a repertory company in Atlantic City. Not too long after that he formed a team with Jack Lewis. They made big-time vaudeville, but broke up, leaving Ed on his own.

He didn't do badly at all—came out with one of the funniest pieces ever staged, "The King's Jester." Don't you remember? Ask Dad. It wowed 'em!

Further, in his long career of comedy, Ed Wynn has never told a smutty story, never even alluded to one. He stayed with the stage and vaudeville until it eked out on him in 1930.

The frantic type of comedian, he has always used costumes to help create his situations and comic environment. A master of the art of the body mask, he turned a high-pitched voice and a speech impediment into a unique comedy personality.

When many a man would have said, "I've had it," Ed started something new. Radio. Then movies. Who can forget "The Chief"?

He's still at it. Just focus your television set and find him. You'll never get rid of Ed Wynn, you lucky laughing people!

Part II

There's No Business Like —



3



VAUDEVILLE WAS NEVER DEAD

Vaudeville never died. Only the major vaudeville circuits died, leaving performers to seek out other places to show off their talents. Many of them have told me that they were tired of the small compensation they received for the tedious long hours they had to work during vaudeville. If you were doing four or five shows a day, it meant getting to the theater by 10 A.M. and not leaving, except for a bite to eat, until after 10 P.M. This, seven days a week, constituted work with a capital W, O, R, and K. Listen to Berle, then say vaudeville died!

"I was born more than forty years ago . . . the stork was busy that day so I was delivered by a gopher . . . that's why I'm so down to earth. It was a rough trip. We were grounded twice, and when we got to the hospital the windows were closed, so I was delivered through a coal chute, which later developed into a blackface act. When my mother first saw me, she started to laugh and she hasn't stopped since."

That's the way Milton Berle tells it! The Berle who has been troupng for years. At the age of five he stepped onto a stage in an imitation of Charlie Chaplin. Broadway cheered him then as it did recently when he starred in "Ziegfeld Follies," which had the longest run of any of the famous "Ziegfeld" shows.

In early motion pictures, Berle played child parts with Ruth

Roland, John Bunny, and Mabel Normand at the old Biograph and Fort Lee Studios. He also appeared in the famous "Perils of Pauline" thrillers with Pearl White.

Milton has been a successful songwriter as well as the author of a joke book. Now he's undisputed number one U.S. performer on TV in his Texaco Star Theatre—half of TV America gets up from its restaurant dinner a little early every Tuesday night to rush home to Berle—and the other half, the half that eats at home, does so with one eye on the food and the other on the pulsating screen.

His is vaudeville. Nothing else. Berle *is* vaudeville. And he has an audience of over ten million people—including relatives.

1951 was a stellar year for Berle. It marked his third year as Mister Television, his third year as the top TV attraction on the American scene, and the year in which the National Broadcasting Company gave him a thirty-year contract. Berle's reaction: "I'm really that great." And he is!

Milton is 41; has Ed Wynn on his neck (Ed says he originated Berle's act in 1913); and, of all things, tried to get a supporting role in "South Pacific." In 1947 he piled up \$750,000.

Milton Berle played in the now defunct Carnival night club on Broadway for over a year at \$10,000 per week. Why? Because he dispenses the type of humor well liked by a metropolitan population like New York's. When television came to the fore and Berle was given his big chance, other metropolitan areas that had a TV station and secured his show found that their populace also went in a big way for New York's Uncle Milt.

One night at the Carnival he introduced Edgar Bergen as the man who made all his money on the Block Market.

He likes to tell about the sign in his hotel room which reads: "Have you left anything?" When he went to pay his income tax, he found the same sign, modified to read: "Have you anything left?"

A typical Berle quip is, "Women without principle draw considerable interest!"

Berle's columns in *Variety*, the show-business weekly, titled, "The Berle-ing Point" have been a continuous source of free material for local comedians. Said he in his "Hangnail Descriptions" in one column: "Phil Baker's gags: Eversharp Repeaters. . . . Career Women: Groom Dodgers . . . Bette Davis: Perpetual Emotion. . . . W. C. Fields: A Hic-Towner. . . . Gabriel Heatter: Good-Rumor Man."

Another regular in the column is his "Observation Department."

Whispered at Café Zanzibar: "He's shy and retiring!" "Yeah, he's shy \$20,000 in his accounts . . . that's why he's retiring!"

Said Berle in another column: "Jack Gilford just invented a tooth-brush with a whip attached . . . for people who want to beat their gums."

Funnyman Milton has used several stooges in his act both on the stage and in radio and TV. Joe Besser has been one of the most familiar to radio audiences.

Berle was admiring an antique chair of Besser's: "Say, Joe, this is a beautiful chair—what is it, a Sheraton 1875, a Hepplewhite 1732, or a Chippendale 1753?"

"Neither," said Besser, "it's a Bloomingdale \$14.98."

On another show Berle informed Besser that he was going to sing a Western song.

"But you can't do that," Besser said. "You have to belong to the union."

"What union?"

"Why, the Western Union, you silly you!"

Joe Besser is the nearest thing to Mr. Five-by-Five this side of Tin Pan Alley. He stands a tall five feet, two inches, and weighs a cool 218 pounds.

Joe just happened as an actor. After finishing the eighth grade in St. Louis, where he was born in 1907, he took a job as popcorn and candy vendor with a carnival. After that he became a song

plugger. When his brother Manny decided to quit being a vaudevillian in favor of business, Joe stepped into his shoes.

It was a zany act he had. "Absolutely nuts," is the way Joe explains it. However, he became a top-notch single with his now-famous "I'll smash you!"

In 1933, Joe crashed Broadway in Shubert's "Passing Show," competing with Ted Healy and the Three Stooges to see which was the more insane. Joe held up his end.

After scoring personal hits, usually as a stooge, on the Fred Allen and Jack Benny radio shows, Besser hit the Broadway boards in 1940 with those other two notorious zanies, Olsen and Johnson, in "Sons o' Fun." It was in this show that Irving Briskin, Columbia producer, saw him and decided that he would be a good bet in pictures. So, obtaining a leave of absence from the cast of "Sons o' Fun," Joe found himself in Hollywood, making his first screen appearance with Ann Miller in "Hey, Rookie."

Since his activity in "Make Mine Manhattan," Joe has traveled across the country many times playing vaudeville and doing guest television shots. His capacities as the perfect stooge, the perennial fall guy, have typed him as the comic who catches the custard pie in the face but is never on the tossing end.

Although Besser says that his best subjects in school were "pinochle and spitballs," he is quietly serious about his career. Asked what he would do if he gave up show business, he says, "I'd rather be dead."

Bert Lahr is the man who "knew them when." It all started on New York's East Side, when Bert was the terror of Public School 77. That was when the neighborhood kids shelled out pennies to keep Eddie Cantor and Al Jolson singing on the street corners. Years later the trio met on Broadway. But that is another story. They were stars by that time.

Lahr himself was just a kid when he shelved school for the theater. Somehow, he actually got bookings for a harum-scarum act he called the "Seven Frolics." Bert was sixteen, his frolicking sextet a year or two younger. They shared road-show billing with another newcomer—Mae West.

The kids prospered and Lahr became known in big-time vaudeville. About this time, Jack Pearl was making a name for himself as a dialect comedian. Lahr joined his act. When Pearl fell ill, Bert took over. He was an instant success. Burlesque was the next step.

"And it was a step forward," says Lahr. "In those days burlesque featured such stars as Fanny Brice, Sophie Tucker, Joe Penner, Trixie Friganza, Jack Haley, Hal Skelly, and James Barton. Both Skelly and Barton rose to fame as dramatic stars. Burlesque wasn't the strip-tease stunt it is today. Mothers even brought kids to see the show."

In the revue, "Delmar's Revels," Lahr was the only attraction to catch the critics' eyes. They missed Patsy Kelly and Frank Fay. They also missed the tune, "I Can't Give You Anything but Love, Baby." No one gave it a tumble.

"Patsy and Frank were just two kids with me in the revue," recalls Lahr. "I also recall a pretty, plump blond girl in the front line of George White's 'Scandals,' in which I starred. She sure did sparkle. Today Alice Faye still has that sparkle—plus! Gypsy Rose Lee and Harriet Hilliard were a couple more unknown chorus girls. So was Lupe Velez. I'll never forget when an overweight obscure singer stepped out on the stage of my starring show, 'Flying High.' She was Kate Smith, an overnight star.

"It was about this time that Eddie Buzzell was Broadway's favorite hick comedian. And Bobby Connolly, in charge of the musical numbers, was my director in 'Varieties,' 'Flying High,' 'Hot-Cha,' 'Hold Everything.'

"Speaking of 'Hold Everything,'" Lahr continues, "that was the show that saw both the de Marcos and Veloz and Yolanda get their start. It also started June Knight and Marjorie White, two of the chorus girls, on brilliant careers. But the girl who caught everyone's attention was a gangling kid with great blue eyes, red-brown hair—a trifle on the skinny side but with a pair of feet that really could talk. She was later the star of 'Ship Ahoy.'

"That 'kid' was Eleanor Powell."

Lahr has been another of the burlesque comedians who can always return to Broadway and carry a show. He came to Times

Square in a revival of the stage play, "Burlesque," after the war and kept it running two full years. He went on the road a year later with "Make Mine Manhattan," and again rang up a new high for road attractions.

Bert Lahr is a sad-faced clown on and off the stage. Using voice inflections and a dead-pan oogle, Bert casts a spell over the most serious listener. His repetition of phrases and voice inflections even in a monotonous tone have made for great comedy through the years.

It isn't very often that an actor gets a chance to portray a character in his home town. Phil Silvers was born, and his family still lives, in the community where almost every able-bodied male is a rabid Dodger fan—Brooklyn. And since Coney Island is a part of that borough, what could be more proper than for Phil Silvers to play a home-town boy in Twentieth Century Fox's "Coney Island"?

He also played a show-business character in the picture—and he comes by this role naturally. Back in 1926, Phil, who had a beautiful lyric boy-soprano voice, picked up a few pennies by singing to the bathers on the beach at Coney. Gus Edwards heard him and invited the lad to see him. That year Phil started off in vaudeville. He was then all of fourteen.

For a couple of years he limited himself to playing vaudeville engagements in and around New York City. His repertory was limited mostly to stuff like "Machushla" and "Trees," and that high lyric voice of his left the folks wet-eyed.

Phil was going along fine with his singing career after he left high school. So fine that much later, when asked to list the towns he'd lived in and for how long, in his studio biographical questionnaire, he answered, "A week in practically every town in America except Utica and Poughkeepsie, which was a split week."

At this time, when he had more offers than he could accept, the boy tenor's voice cracked irreparably. Phil might thus have gone into honorable retirement as a superannuated boy thrush, but show business was too much in his blood and there was no stopping for him. The booking agents, however, couldn't keep from think-

ing of him as a sentimental type and there just weren't any jobs for a while.

But Phil wanted to be a comedian. It was by sheer dint of sitting in innumerable outer offices that he got his first break as an insolent kid stooge out in the audience in a comedy act. Thus he broke the ice, and was doing fine when a new catastrophe overtook him. This time it wasn't his voice, but vaudeville which cracked. As the old variety time hit the end of the trail, dates were fewer and fewer. Phil wound up working in burlesque for Minsky. His partner—Rags Ragland! A burlesque comic then was merely regarded as the guy who filled in time until the stripper could garb herself so she could start disrobing all over again. But Silvers and Ragland were gaining recognition on Broadway in their own right.

It was then that Phil, excellent at the song-styled type of comedy and the monologue, was recruited by George Abbott to play one of the leads in "See My Lawyer," and the following year he was one of the principals in "Yokel Boy." Thereafter Hollywood beckoned and things began to happen fast. Garson Kanin cast him as the Good Humor Man in "Tom, Dick, and Harry," and it proved to be one of those bits that are unforgettable. Warner Brothers gave him top billing with Jimmy Durante in a minor epic called "You're in the Army Now."

Phil brought a weak musical, "High Button Shoes," into Broadway and made a very big hit out of it. He scored on television, too, and then headed back to Hollywood with starring roles—not like the ones Twentieth-Century Fox used to toss at him in B musicals.

Phil Silvers can write his own ticket now—and no wonder, with the talent he offers.

The dictionary defines "pantomime" as a series of actions, gestures, and postures used to express ideas or convey information. But to Jimmy Savo it's more than that.

Early in his career, Jimmy had teamed with Fred Allen. That broken up, he turned to the talent and technique for which he has been famous—that of turning a melancholy mood into hilarious

comedy. It has carried him through rave revues, musical comedies, and famous night spots the world over. It has won him a definite top rung on the comedy ladder.

Jimmy Savo was singing in the streets of New York when he was four years old. As soon as he was old enough he turned to amateur nights, where he won prizes ranging from turkeys to gold medals. Vaudeville saw him first as the "child wonder juggler," and then, in turn, he performed as a rope walker, dancer, singer, comedian, and, of course, pantomimist.

There's more than talent to Jimmy Savo. There's probably more spirit there than you'll find anywhere else in showdom. About three years ago, Jimmy had to have one of his legs amputated. He's no young man, and showdom wondered whether they'd ever see the little guy with the inexhaustible bag of comedy front and center again. Those who wondered underestimated Jimmy Savo. Instead of languishing in a hospital, feeling sorry for himself, he was busily working on his first novel, *Little World, Hello*, and as soon as he could learn to use the wooden substitute they gave him, Jimmy was back on stage, wowing a record audience.

Those people across the footlights didn't come and pay good money out of sympathy. They came to laugh.

Jimmy Savo didn't let them down. He's never let anyone down, not himself, not show business, and certainly not comedy. He's been holding up his share of it for more than a quarter of a century.

One of the most famous of clowns, A. Robbins, started his career on the stage as a caricature artist at the age of twelve, using grease paint instead of chalk for his sketches.

Although his internationally famous act is less than ten minutes long, it requires three hours to prepare for each performance. He wears a special coat which is a veritable cornucopia disgorging a thousand and one things, among which are more than three-hundred bananas, the latter being the reason he bills himself as "the banana man."

He never speaks—only hums—as he proceeds to display an

almost unbelievable bulk of articles taken from his voluminous overcoat; it requires a miniature three-car freight train to haul the props away.

The comedy relief offered by such a personality as Robbins is in great contrast to the wild flamboyancy of the other "anything-for-a-laugh" boys.

Fifty-eight years in show business is a lot of years to look back on. Victor Moore celebrated his seventy-fifth birthday February 24, 1951, and that same day rounded out his fifty-eighth year as an entertainer. The half century and more adds up to a collection of memories as rich and varied as those of any trouper.

Not all of them are pleasant. Victor has had to play benefits to get out of towns in his day. He's had a show close out from under him because the leading lady's husband committed suicide by leaping from a hotel window. He's done as many as forty different shows in a single year.

Victor was born in Hammonton, New Jersey, where his father ran a general store. Encouraged by his family in his stage ambitions, he made his professional debut at the age of sixteen as a "super" in "Babes in the Woods." This was produced in Boston, and Victor made all of \$3.50 a week.

Three years later he tried out as a female impersonator for Klaw and Erlanger, as the Giant's wife in "Jack and the Beanstalk," but Abe Erlanger fired him, assuring him the stage was no place for him. Years later Erlanger featured him in "The Talk of New York," which George M. Cohan wrote especially for Moore.

Despite Erlanger's gloomy prophecy, Victor continued in stock and made frequent excursions into vaudeville. Then came an opportunity to join the cast of "Rosemary," headed by John Drew, Maude Adams, and Arthur Byron. Victor's part paid him \$4 per week. He lived in a tiny room, cooked his own meals, and when "Rosemary" closed, returned to vaudeville. He bought the sketch, "Change Your Act, or Back to the Woods," in which he played on and off for the next twenty-five years, starting at sixty dollars per

week and working up to as high as two thousand dollars. The original cost of the skit to him was one hundred and twenty-five dollars!

While playing in the Brighton Music Hall at Coney Island, he met and married Emma Littlefield, who joined him in the act, the billing thereafter being always "Moore and Littlefield." Established as a comedian, he signed a five-year contract with Cohan and Sam Harris, who years later gave him his celebrated role of Vice-President Throttlebottom in "Of Thee I Sing." Cohan also wrote "Forty-five Minutes from Broadway" for him, in which Fay Templeton was featured. Victor Moore had turned the corner to success.

He entered pictures with the idea that it would be a rest from the stage, but in his first day's work in "Chimmie Fadden" he was hit on the head and generally knocked around for the sake of laughs. He continued in such pictures as "Chimmie Fadden Out West," "The Race," and "The Clown," was featured in forty-one one-reelers, then decided that the stage was perhaps more restful after all.

In 1930 he appeared in "Dangerous Dan McGrew" and in "Heads Up," then in 1932 scored his greatest stage triumph with William Gaxton in "Of Thee I Sing," which won the Pulitzer drama prize.

After another series of one-reel comedies, he played in the satirical musical sequel to "Of Thee I Sing"—"Let 'Em Eat Cake—" was signed to another film contract, and thereafter alternated between stage and screen.

Back on Broadway he reteamed with William Gaxton in "Leave It to Me," the show which made a star of Mary Martin with her "My Heart Belongs to Daddy" number. In the following year, 1940, came Buddy DeSylva's smash hit production of "Louisiana Purchase." It was inevitable that Moore should repeat his inimitable characterization of Senator Loganberry, the bumbling old investigating committee of one, who manages to outwit his adversaries despite his apparent pitiable dimwittedness.

Many comics have traveled the boards with a squeaky voice and a shy air about them. But this short, baldish, pudgy man who re-

sembles a small-town bank clerk is the master of them all. Victor Moore took Mr. Milquetoast from vaudeville to musical comedy, on to the movies, and now into television!

These days not many comedy stars come from the Great White Way. Carol Channing was an overnight exception. Broadway took the five-foot-nine-inch, 153-pound girl into its arms early in 1950. And it doesn't look as if it will let her go for a long time to come.

Carol is the latest and most sensational thing that's come to comedy and to show business. Her vehicle, "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," Anita Loos's best seller of the 1920's, stars her as a little girl from Little Rock who plaintively tells you how "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend." Immediately after opening night Carol had the box office all set with an advance sale of \$600,000—and, that for Broadway box offices, is a record!

Little Rock notwithstanding, Carol Channing was born in Seattle, Washington, in 1921. She was star-struck early—ever since she was in a school play at the age of six—but she kept quiet about it. With her, her career was too serious to discuss.

She charmed classmates in high school with her impersonations, and finally won her mother and herself a trip to Honolulu for delivering the best four-minute speech on "What Americanism Means To Me."

Then she went to Bennington College, where after two years one of her instructors urged her to take her talent to Broadway. Carol did and it didn't work out so well. She got herself married to "a Greenwich Village intellect," and subsequently divorced. Now she's married to a professional football star, Alexander Carson.

Three years after leaving Bennington she was in California. She got a part in the Hollywood revue "Lend An Ear," and when it was brought to Broadway, she went along. She got mildly marvelous reviews then, but no one, most of all Carol, suspected she would ever wind up in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes." But when producers Herman Levine and Oliver Smith heard her read the part, it was hers, and at a cool thousand dollars a week.

At the party given after opening night, Carol Channing appeared in a rented mink coat. She was baffled at the rave notices

she'd received. There were a lot of other people baffled too. Here was a gal who didn't have a "name." Except for her supporting part in "Lend An Ear" she'd hardly been heard of. Now all the kings and queens of show business were paying her homage.

Carol's whole technique is one of seriousness. You've got to know your character, she believes. And because Carol has spent a lot of time studying people, she knows that people, even those who are funny to others, take themselves quite, quite seriously.

When and if "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" leaves Broadway, Carol Channing needn't worry. Her future in comedy is made.

A natural trigger wit, Morey Amsterdam has a photographic memory for jokes and funny situations, and next to Milton Berle, Morey has in his noggin probably the biggest collection of funny quips in show business.

Morey was born in Chicago in 1912 and grew up in San Francisco, where his dad played with the San Francisco Symphony. He played cello in the high-school orchestra, and to this day likes to bring it out on the stage to add to his comic routine. He made his first radio appearance with Will Rogers, but the five years he spent with Al Pearce constituted his real debut as a writer and comedian. As a song writer his greatest successes with the American public were "Rum and Coco Cola" and "Why Did I Ever Leave Wyoming."

Amsterdam was formerly married to Mabel Todd, a comedienne who also appeared with Morey on the Al Pearce Show. He has one boy by his second wife, and the youngster has already made several radio appearances in a comic routine written by his daddy. A second child arrived as this book went to press.

Amsterdamism runs like this:

"Love is blind. I guess that's why it proceeds by the sense of touch."

"Isn't radio wonderful? How else can you get at so many people who can't get at you?"

"Sad story department: Sam Crolnick, a golf pro out of a job, was walking the streets with his spiked golf shoes, which were

all he had left. Sam hadn't eaten in three days, when all of a sudden he looked down and there in front of him was a brand-new unused meal ticket. He got so excited that when he went to pick it up, he accidentally stepped on it with his spiked shoes, and punched out every meal in the ticket!"

"PERSONAL: Cyril S. Am returning your binoculars. They are no good. Besides, the girl across the street now dresses with the window shades down."

"In an effort to prevent the constant migration of too many poor people to the West Coast, California authorities have posted signs at all the borders. The signs read: 'Bums will not be admitted to California, unless they have contracts in pictures.'"

"Add similes: As unnecessary as a birth announcement in a small town. . . . As sincere as a tap dancer's smile. . . . As true as a three-dollar cornet."

"SUCCESS STORY: An actor who spent a week end at Rockaway Beach, telling another actor he just got back from the Coast."

Jerry Lester, the comedian of the sharp wit and the free, unconfined expression, is currently the star of one of TV's most popular shows, "Broadway Open House." For an easygoing comic like Lester, TV is the ideal medium, allowing him to work with his audience in an informal, friendly manner suited to his patter.

According to Jerry Lester, TV entertaining is as intimate as inviting a friend over for tea. "Art is freedom of expression," he says, "and I don't like a monotonous sameness characterizing my performance. If one idea carries for an hour, who cares if six other ideas weren't expressed? Suppose the six ideas were so rushed none of them was good? Which makes the better show? I prefer just having fun."

Before TV, Jerry had his own radio program. Prior to that he had been featured on the air waves with Frank Sinatra, Rudy Vallee, and Bing Crosby. Vaudeville, night-club entertaining, and musical comedy were also part of Jerry's comic schooling. Remember his sidesplitting routine as a sidewalk salesman selling shaving cream? Uninhibited Mr. Lester would fully lather himself

on the stage, show after show, all the while saying out of the side of his mouth to a stooge, "Go way, boy, ya bother me, ya bother me."

There is little doubt among critics, however, that Jerry Lester's real media is TV. Columnist Earl Wilson calls him, "As great as the greatest—maybe a little greater." And exacting critic Howard Barnes of the *New York Herald-Tribune* said of him, "He is in the great tradition of musical comedy."

Jerry is responsible for introducing Dagmar to the public. Buxom, tall, and blonde, she was sought after within a year by every executive in TV. At one time—and still—a singer, she plays the dumb-blonde type, a characterization the American public loves and never seems to tire of.

Maxie Rosenbloom tells the American public how he became a comedian in these words:

"I've always wanted to be on the stage," he says, "I didn't want to do Hamlet, so I did the next best thing—Omelette!—I laid eggs.

"I was on the stage before I started fighting. I used to be part of Solly Shaw's amateur night. I'd do anything. Act, dance, assist magicians, anything to make a buck. And that's all I'd make—a buck.

"When I started to go places in the ring, I had to forget my theatrical career. One day while I was champ, I was training in California, and Carole Lombard came to watch me. She was interested in learning the womanly art of boxing and she wanted some lessons.

"Well, for two weeks I put the gloves on with her and sparred around. She said to me, 'Maxie, how'd you like to get into pictures?' 'How'd I like it?' (Once a ham, always a ham.) 'I'll do it for a buck,' I said. 'Never mind,' she said, 'I'll get you five hundred a week.' I liked that much better. The next day I was on the set of 'Nothing Sacred.' 'I ain't rehearsed anything,' I said. But this was just practice. So I ad-libbed a scene and that was all. 'No retakes?' I asked. 'We're just going to do it once.' Gimme a chance, fellows,

I thought. Everybody else they take over eight or nine times—just to get it right.

“When the picture came out, I was in it. Not the rehearsed scene—but the first one—the scene in which I had done the ad lib. They decided that was much better.

“Warner Brothers saw the film—and the next day I was signed up. I was a comedian. It says so in my contract!”

A Hoosier humorist, also a vaudevillian in modern dress, is the surprisingly young Herb Shriner.

Tall and blond, Herb, whose radio personality generally places him in the late forties, actually is about thirty—seemingly more a bobby-soxer than the fireside philosopher he actually is. But unlike the bobby-sox heroes, Herb can generally be seen lounging around in an eighteen-dollar corduroy suit, playing a battered little harmonica which was given to him ten years ago, and “chewing the fat” with the “old-timers.”

Directly in a great tradition of humor (George Ade, Joe Cook, Abe Martin), Herb hails from Fort Wayne, Indiana. His first contact with show business came through the harmonica, amateur contests, and a barn-dance radio program.

Herb was an inveterate contest enterer, whether of husking bees, pie-eating races, or harmonica fests. In fact, it was that tinny little harmonica of the “amateur night” which started him on the long road to the big time. First came the organization of a harmonica class in school, then a high-school harmonica band, and lastly a quintet backed by a local music store owner who traded his harmonicas for free advertising from the boys. Still in their teens, the five toured Indiana, riding the backs of reconverted jalopies, sleeping in theater seats, and doing everything—including the building of the stages—for their performances. But his four partners were soon recalled by their parents, and Herb was left to wander on alone.

His wanderings, after canvassing the state of Indiana, first took him to Detroit, where he was booked in vaudeville. Here, he says, “I slowly fell into my sloppy hick routine.” Then came

Chicago and the West Coast, and at the age of eighteen, Australia and the South Sea Islands. "It was like going to the moon," Herb says of that vaudeville trip, which included such old-time vaudevillians as Anna May Wong, the Mills Brothers, and Nick Lucas.

Back on the West Coast, Herb was featured in all the leading audition rooms and wound up on a one-year NBC sustainer with the newcomers, Johnny Johnson, Martha Tilton, Gordon Jenkins, and Cliff Arquette. But his first big break came with a booking on the Kate Smith show. About that time, too, he appeared at the Roxy in New York.

Herb hasn't much to say when it comes to career advice—"Just be yourself"—and the formula apparently works, at least for this homespun cracker-barrel commentator who has spent many successful years doing that very, very delightful thing.

Frank Fay was born in San Francisco. His parents were stage folk and their wardrobe trunk became Frank's cradle.

At the age of six he made his first New York stage appearance, dressed as a Teddy bear in Victor Herbert's "Babes in Toyland." Frank's first vaudeville job was at the New York Theatre in a sketch by James Forbes called "O'Leary's Kid." Forbes was so impressed with Fay's performance that he took him out of the act and put him into "The Chorus Lady" with Rose Stahl. He later appeared with Sir Henry Irving and E. H. Sothorn in Shakespearean roles. In the golden days of vaudeville his personality and ever-ready wit endeared him to his audiences even as it does now.

On his first appearance in the citadel of vaudeville, the Palace, he stayed for two weeks, a feat almost unheard of in those days. He became such a Palace institution that one year he broke his own record and played twenty-six out of the fifty-two weeks.

Then came musical comedy and starring roles in "Jim Jam Jems," "Frank Fay's Fables," and other shows. When Hollywood beckoned, Frank in typical "do it right" manner made a full dozen pictures. Success on the radio and record-breaking engagements in night clubs followed. He starred in the de-luxe vaudeville show, "Laugh Time." In "Harvey," Elwood Dowd was his first straight

role since his baby days, and for this he won the 1944-45 Donaldson Award for the outstanding male lead performance.

Fay is now due to try television. Should he master that art as well as he has others, the laugh-hungry world will be more than a little grateful.

When Lew Parker was the star of a Friday evening radio program, he plugged "Are You With It?" on the air before he rushed to the theater for the show.

Lew had Ole Olsen's part in "Hellzapoppin" on tour, and has acted in New York in "Red Hot and Blue," "Girl Crazy," and other musicals. He spent eighteen consecutive months clowning and singing in the Southwest Pacific for the USO during the war.

Lew is another of the trigger-wit comedians. His Broadway delivery and casualness make him typical of the new school of comedy. He is currently starring with Frances Langford on the coast-to-coast show, "The Dickersons."

Mae West has probably done more for "sex" than any other personality in history.

When she wrote "Diamond Lil" during a ten-week vacation, she not only originated one of the biggest money-making enterprises in show business, she also started a stream of long-remembered quotations. The honey-dripped lippings of Lil will go down as legend in U.S. comedy. For instance, the tried and true:

"My goodness, those are beautiful diamonds."

"Goodness had nothing to do with it!"

Walter Winchell summed it up pretty well when he wrote, "She is the critic's bosom friend."

"Lil" is the same play in which those famous words, "Come up and see me sometime," were first spoken. It played to record-breaking crowds in London for a year—including a performance before Britain's Royal Family. But this is not the only claim to fame for the perennial star. It was she who discovered such screen personalities as Cary Grant, George Raft, Jack LaRue, and Cesar Romero. During the war Mae attained world-wide renown when a

life-saving device for use at sea was named after her, and of course in all matters pertaining to sex and censorship Mae's opinion is considered a prerequisite by news editors. In fact, she did a story on the Kinsey report for *Cosmopolitan* magazine!

Remember what the violin did for Jack Benny?

It did the same for Henny Youngman. Youngman, chosen by the National Laugh Week Foundation to serve as Comedy Consultant of the Gagwriter's Protective Association, is considered by many as the patron saint of the gagwriters. His dressing room is always crowded with gagsters and scripts. The list of personalities he's given a start in this unusual profession reads like the Who's Who of gagdom.

It was the annoying stress of economic need that compelled the lanky gentleman with the droll face and the fast wit to desert his hot violin for the comedy stage. That and the fact that they laughed at his G-String Concerto—they roared when the string broke.

Youngman was raised in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn—a good start for any comedian. He began annoying the neighbors with jive choruses on the fiddle from the time he was eight. His parents had fondly intended their first-born son to be another Heifetz. A jazz record channeled his resources elsewhere. While the Youngman household declared a week of mourning over the death of their hopes for a Youngman concert at Carnegie Hall, Henny himself vigorously set about organizing one of Brooklyn's first jazz bands.

But in 1929, Brooklyn was giving the Bronx cheer to jazz. His band would play at a party or a wedding, and the guests would complain that the bandleader was funny; so was the music. So Youngman decided to give up music, took out an old joke book, created a routine, and started killing the people in small hideaway cabarets and shady speakeasies.

This rough-and-tumble background enabled Youngman to develop his raucous style and taught him to time gags and win over a hostile audience. Henny's big break came when he went into the landmark of the thirties, the famed Yacht Club. Quickly he won

a tremendous word-of-mouth reputation as the funniest gagster in Manhattan.

A typical Youngman nifty: "My brother couldn't get a job as bartender because he doesn't know how to fix a television set."

When Ken Murray started in show business over eighteen years ago, he was the first "emcee" to announce an entire show at the Palace, the mecca of big-time vaudeville.

But this, and his career on radio, are not nearly as interesting or as important as what Ken Murray has done during the past few years. For these were the years that Ken made his "Blackouts" of 1942, '43, '44, '45, '46, '47, '48, and '49 one of the most entertaining and one of the most talked-of shows ever produced in this country.

In the early part of 1942, Murray had an idea, and being a man of action set out to do something about it. The idea was to combine vaudeville with a flavor of musical comedy—which meant first-rate novelty acts with tons of laughs and, of course, beautiful girls.

The result was duly noted and enthusiastically attested to by a packed house of celebrities and theatergoers on the night of June 24, under the title of "Blackouts of 1942." And after that night, people, a couple of million of them, screamed with laughter at this variety revue as it changed to "Blackouts of 1943," then to "Blackouts of 1944," and on and on perennially through the forties.

"Blackouts" outstripped any other attraction ever to appear in a major legitimate theater in Los Angeles, and still holds all-time record runs for this type of entertainment for the entire nation.

With no "Blackouts" now, Ken has a good, fat TV contract for \$104,000 per year.

He still ad-libs like this: "I know a politician who believes that there are two sides to every question—and takes them both!"

Back in 1942, Marie Wilson signed a two-week contract with Ken for "Blackouts." She didn't leave at the end of two weeks, however; her stay grew into years. One night she told Ken that she didn't feel secure enough with her temporary work—she wished he would give her a regular job! And Marie, incidently, is introduced

by Ken as "my best friend and severest critic"! Her career was reborn with her long-term contract in "Blackouts."

Sid Caesar, who made his legitimate-theater debut in "Make Mine Manhattan," comes naturally by the double talk and sound-mimicry in which he specializes. When he was a boy in Yonkers, New York, he practiced double-talking with his two brothers, never dreaming that he would one day put the gibberish to professional use. For Caesar's real love was the saxophone, an instrument he played in Don Appel's band for ten dollars a week. Enormously popular with his fellow musicians, he amused them with his clowning and harangued them with lunatic speeches.

Caesar moved from one band to another until, at the age of nineteen, he enlisted in the Coast Guard. Assigned to pier duty in Brooklyn, he plodded along the docks at night and found plenty of time to work out sketches for a musical show, which he called "Six On, Twelve Off." The entertainment, used by the Coast Guard in a recruiting show, went on tour. When composer Vernon Duke, another Coast Guardsman, and author Howard Dietz wrote "Tars and Spars," the official Coast Guard show, they called on Caesar to play the comedy lead. At every base Caesar had his audiences howling with glee at his airplane routine and other antics.

After his discharge, Sid played in the screen version of the same show with Alfred Drake and Janet Blair. His next movie appearance was in "The Guilt of Janet Ames." Since his return to New York he's not only been a favorite in night spots and theaters, but his quick and distinctly fresh wit—plus his elastic flabbergasting expressions—have pushed him up the big-time television ladder, until now he is one of the new medium's top men.

The greatest claim to fame of the late Joe Yule, born Ninnian Yule II, was that he was the father of Ninnian Yule III, otherwise known as Mickey Rooney, alias Andy Hardy (a name, incidentally, which Ninnian III would darn well like to forget!)

Papa Joe recently played as Finian McLonergan, hero of "Finian's Rainbow."

There was every reason why Joe should have been a success

in this play, for he had had long and thorough training in the hardest and best of the old theatrical schools, burlesque and vaudeville. However, he never got the breaks in the big time until after his kid (Mickey just cannot grow up on the screen) hit the celluloid jackpot; then Joe turned from a fading burlesque stage to motion pictures.

Joe Yule was born in Scotland, in April, 1894, which makes him about as Irish as the lake of Lomond; but since he "looks" Irish he has invariably played Irish characters — always with success.

Nevertheless, until he was selected for "Finian's Rainbow," his name had never graced a Broadway bill, even though it was familiar enough in New York's West Forties, Chicago's Loop, and Hollywood's Sunset Boulevard.

Joe played in the Jiggs and Maggie films for Monogram, and has made a number of appearances in pictures starring his son, but his major screen performances have been in "Idiot's Delight" and "Panama Hattie."

They say Joe made the hit of his life in the role of Finian, the "Philosopher, Scientist, Fabricator Extraordinary." Maybe Joe had a little of Finian McLonergan in him, for when a guy plays with his heart he finds almost always that he has a hit on his hands.

A great dialectician, Benny Rubin is typical of the type of comedian prominent in productions of the Yiddish Art Theatre in New York.

Retired now from the comedy scene, Benny was popular on the stage and in radio during its early years. One of his big coast-to-coast shows was the Mutual Amateur Program when the Mutual Network was in its infancy. Rubin was here a good master of ceremonies, a patient performer, and of course a fine monologist.

Words never came out the right way when they left Rubin's mouth, and therefore their effect was always comical.

Fanny Brice helped many in show business. During the time Gypsy Rose Lee and her sister June Havoc were touring the country with their mother in a road show called "Dainty June and

Her Newsboys," June ran off and got married. Gypsy went into vaudeville and soon met Fanny, who was playing on the same bill. Fanny had a tremendous influence on Gypsy. She guided her and coached her, and for many years they were best of friends. For Fanny took what little talent Gypsy had and showed her off with special clothes, shoes, and hairdos. Gypsy has often referred to herself as "the greatest no-talent girl in show business."

Fanny was a good trouser in all branches of show business. She was a comedienne in burlesque when it was family burlesque. She graduated to musical comedy, and although Ziegfeld couldn't glorify her, he did dress her up to be one of the best comediennes to grace his stage.

Fanny successfully trouped the vaudeville circuits. And then went on to radio. Motion-picture activities brought her to Hollywood, and when Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer was building a radio show, she was spotted in it and became an overnight hit.

Baby Snooks was not a new character when Fanny Brice introduced her to radio audiences. She was born over thirty years ago. However, her age remained the same—a constant seven.

Hanley Stafford developed the character of a real frustrated father of this tricky little brat. A typical sketch went something like this:

Daddy tells Snooks one day that there is a rich man who wants to buy Robespierre, her little brother. In fact Daddy tells her that he has been offered a thousands dollars a pound.

"Should I sell him?" says Daddy quizzically.

"How much does he weigh?" Snooks asks.

"About thirty pounds," Daddy says. "Well, shall I sell him?"

"No, Daddy."

"That's the way I like to hear you talk," Daddy beams.

"Let's fatten him up and then sell him."

Vaudeville, by far the nation's most popular form of stage entertainment in its lusty prime, did not die. It got a little sick, or maybe people got a little sick of it, but in 1928 there were approximately a thousand variety shows housed in the United States

and Canada. Two million admirers attended daily performances. When New York's Palace Theatre abandoned its two-a-day policy on November 16, 1932, performers held a wake. It was a sad time for many who had not yet found a niche in radio or in the movies, but actually vaudeville was only in a cataleptic state. Radio, night clubs, and musical shows on Broadway and on the road opened many thousand more outlets for the really talented ex-vaudevillian. And who, after all, was to say this wasn't vaudeville? Maybe it wasn't the Palace—but then! . . .

When vaudeville returned to the Palace Theatre in May, 1949, Joe Laurie, Jr., compiled a bill for *Variety* that would have been all-time ideal vaudeville had it been possible to present it:

Joe Jackson, the clown cyclist . . . Doyle and Dixon, dance stylists . . . Burns and Allen . . . Roger Imhoff, Corrinne, and Conn, and the irrepressible skit, "The Pest House" . . . Bert Williams, a truly beloved vaudevillian . . . Frank Keenan, with his memorable "The Southerner" . . . Will Rogers, an original in variety, a gentleman . . . Nora Bayes and Jack Norworth, a top singing pair . . . Smith and Dale, classics on vaudeville and now on television . . . and Willie, West, and McGinty, who half murdered each other with planks, brick, and plaster.

Laurie gives this list of the greats among all vaudeville acts:

Single women: Eva Tanguay, Nan Halperin, Belle Baker, Blossom Seeley, Ethel Waters, Florence Moore, Fanny Brice, Beatrice Lillie, Irene Franklin, Alice Lloyd, and Sophie Tucker.

Great monologists: Walter C. Kelly, Julius Tannen, Will Rogers, Marshall P. Wilder, Fred Niblo, and Cliff Gordon.

Dramatic acts: Julius Steger, George Beban, Leslie Carter, Sarah Bernhardt, and Ethel Barrymore.

Comedy skits: Cressy and Dayne, Harry Watson, Jr., Ed. Blondell, Bert Leslie, Leon Errol, and Imhoff, Corrinne, and Conn.

Next-to-closing-acts: Al Jolson, Jim Barton, Willie Howard, Eddie Cantor, Joe Cook, Jack Benny, Phil Baker, Frank Tinney, Ed Wynn, Fred Allen, Bert Williams, and McIntyre and Heath.

Dancers: Doyle and Dixon, Jack Donahue, Adelaide and Hughes, Fred and Adele Astaire, the Castles, Harriet Hctor, and Bill Robinson.

Mimics: Ina Claire, Elsie Janis, Gertrude Hoffman, Belle Blanche, and Georgie Price.

And a few acts that will fit in anywhere: Clark and McCullough, Weber and Fields, the four Marx Brothers, and Clayton, Jackson and Durante.

But there are so many memorable and great names on the variety roster that no two fan lists would be the same.

Comedians like Edgar Bergen still think that vaudeville is a natural training ground for talent.

"Nothing," vowed Bergen in an interview with Sid Shalit in the *New York Daily News*, "will benefit movies, radio, and television as much as the revival of vaudeville.

"That was what helped blitzkrieg radio. No new personalities were being developed because the old proving grounds—the vaudeville stage—no longer existed."

However, if Edgar reads this book he will find numerous personalities who rose on the American comedy scene after the vaudeville circuit was abandoned.

Honest sentiment and nostalgia among people have created a desire for a full-fledged return to vaudeville—a function which television has begun in part to fill. Milton Berle has shown that it can be done via video and that people will love it. For there has always been room for new laugh makers. It is only the outlets which have changed throughout the years.



4



THE HOOPER HEAP

There is one guy who can top any comedian on the air today. He is C. E. Hooper. This gentleman makes daily and nightly surveys on the listening habits of our fair population and comes up regularly with amazing results.

Our millionaire comedians find themselves played about by listeners on an imaginary checkerboard. One time you will find Fred Allen on the top of the heap and next it will be Bob Hope.

As of December 31, 1947, a year that was financially successful for the great majority of funnymen, we find the Hooperating listing the most popular radio shows as following: 1. Fibber McGee and Molly. 2. Jack Benny. 3. Fred Allen. 4. Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy. 5. Lux Radio Theatre. 6. Red Skelton. 7. Amos 'n' Andy. 8. Bob Hope. 9. Walter Winchell. 10. Mr. District Attorney. 11. Phil Harris. 12. Al Jolson. 13. Godfrey's Talent Scouts. 14. Truth or Consequences. 15. Duffy's Tavern.

In 1950 it went like this: 1. Jack Benny. 2. Lux Radio Theatre. 3. Godfrey's Talent Scouts. 4. Walter Winchell. 5. Fibber McGee and Molly. 6. My Friend Irma. 7. Bing Crosby. 8. Bob Hope. 9. Groucho Marx. 10. People Are Funny. 11. Big Town. 12. Bob Hawk Show. 13. Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons. 14. Amos 'n' Andy. 15. Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy.

Let's take a glance at the earlier picture. The only program

that is not a comedy show is No. 10, "Mr. District Attorney." Number 5, "The Lux Radio Theatre," more than 80 per cent of the time presents a screen play that has a great deal of comedy in it, and the producers have found this type of play to be the most popular. Shows like this one give men like Gary Cooper, Clark Gable, Jimmy Stewart, Robert Taylor, Tyrone Power, and Cary Grant a chance to show the citizens that they can make the nation laugh.

The networks claim they are continually looking for bright new comedy shows. During 1947, CBS found itself with two new smash hits, "Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts" and "My Friend Irma." They also tried to build Robert Q. Lewis into a top-flight comedian but were unsuccessful. Lewis, however, has "hit" in TV.

But Abe Burrows, who was carried along with the CBS search for new comedians, scored well in 1949 and showed that his background of writing, producing, and supervising had made a better comedian out of him.

For years Abe toiled in comparative obscurity, but in the profession he is esteemed as a "wit's wit; the humorist's humorist." This bowing from the waist by the professionals stems from appreciation of Burrow's masterful sense of satire. Sit him down at the piano, fill the room with such humorists as S. J. Perleman and Donald Ogden Stewart, and with such comedians as Fred Allen, Danny Kaye, and Groucho Marx, and the sad lines in the assembled faces are transformed into smiles, then break into laughter, for hour on hour, far into the night.

Forty-year-old Abe is a walking almanac—comic edition. He runs an easygoing, very funny monologue, with plenty of overtones of the acid-keen observation he's gifted with. He also plays, in quite unorthodox fashion, the piano. Somehow, he says, he can get his fingers on top of a tune, but the self-taught fingerings are all wrong. He loves to kid the shirt off Tin Pan Alley lyrics but lays off the "good things, real things, like the best of Cole Porter, or the best of Irving Berlin."

"The difficulty," he says (of an act), "increases in direct proportion to the excellence of the original product."

A radio and screen veteran, Abe started writing gags for

radio's Texaco Star Theatre in 1939. After that he scripted for Ed Gardner's "This is New York," where he introduced the character Archie who inspired the "Duffy's Tavern" show. Now, of course, TV is being enriched by his personality and ideas.

Abe believes that many a sin of racial bigotry is perpetrated under the guise of humor, and such stuff is strictly out with him, no matter how big a laugh must be sacrificed.

Jim and Marian Jordan—as Fibber McGee and Molly—have repeatedly been voted the most popular comedy team in radio. It is no longer a surprise to the trade to find the McGee laffcasts holding the attention of radio's largest listening audience.

While the year-by-year increase in popularity of their NBC broadcasts has been a source of wonder and satisfaction to the Jordans, it has meant more than just success and all the things money can buy. Fibber and Molly have made the Jordans' fondest dream come true, a permanent home and security for their two children, Kathryn and James Edward, Jr.,—to say nothing of a thousand acres of cattle-grazing land.

The Jordans met during choir practice in their home town of Peoria, Illinois. Jim was seventeen, Marian sixteen; it was love at first sight. Jim, having graduated from high school, worked as a clerk in a wholesale drug house, and Marian gave piano lessons. The fact that she had twenty-three pupils made her an awe-inspiring figure to Jim, whose salary was eight dollars a week.

In September, 1917, Jim's vocal teacher, E. Warren K. Howe, secured an audition for him with a quartet in Chicago. Jim became top tenor in a vaudeville act known as "A Night With The Poets."

But sleeper-jumps, hotel rooms, poor food, dirty dressing rooms, split-weeks, and one-night stands soon found the farmer's son lonesome for home. And Marian was still in Peoria. In May of 1918, World War I was raging, and Jim returned to Peoria and tried to enlist. But the Army was no longer taking volunteers, so he became a mail carrier and asked Marian to marry him.

Five days after their marriage (August 31, 1918) Jim was on

a troop train bound for Camp Forrest, Georgia. Six weeks later Private Jordan landed in Brest, France. He was flat on his back with influenza the day the Armistice was signed.

It was the war that returned Jim to show business. Following the Armistice, he was attached to the Entertainment Division, and staged shows throughout France. It wasn't until July 9, 1919, that Jim got back to Peoria and Marian, who had returned to teaching piano to pay the bills.

Then came a succession of jobs for the restless Jordan. During the evenings, after work, Jim and Marian sang and played at the club affairs. Ralph Miller, an advance man for a theatrical company, heard them one evening and convinced the Jordans that they had a future in show business. But the venture required a thousand dollars.

They sold their car for \$125. Aunt Kate loaned Jim \$500. The equity in their beloved home made up the difference, and Mr. and Mrs. Jordan of Peoria, were in show business.

Sixteen weeks of tank towns, opera houses, and musty halls followed. But their act was a success. There was a long vaudeville tour which they played until two months before their second child was born.

When they went on the road again, their new act failed to click, and the Jordans went back home. Jim became a clerk in a dry-goods store for ten dollars a week.

They found out about this thing called radio during a visit to Jim's brother in Chicago. While listening to a broadcast, Jim commented, "We could do a better job of singing than anyone on that program."

"Ten dollars says you can't," dared his brother.

And so it was that on a dare two shaky people started on a radio career that one day would make kilocycle history. They drove to the station (WIBO) that very night, and were on the air before they knew what was happening.

The next day they had a sponsor—and ten dollars a broadcast, once a week. Five months later the radio job ran out. The two went back to vaudeville to pay debts accumulated trying to run a home on ten dollars a week.

But as soon as the bills were taken care of, they returned to radio—this time on WENR, doing three shows a week and getting sixty dollars. Now they could have their home and eat too. This was in 1927. In 1931 they met Don Quinn, a discouraged cartoonist who thought he could write for radio. The Jordan-Quinn combination turned out "Smackout," a five-times-a-week NBC serial. Quinn has been writing their material ever since.

Early in 1935 the makers of Johnson's Wax decided that the Jordans were just what they were looking for; Fibber McGee and Molly were born. And what has followed has been better than they had ever dared hope.

Here's some of their down-to-earth comedy:

When the decorator they'd hired advocated a more orderly closet system for the house, Fibber immediately dispensed with his services.

"What's that bird trying to do," he yelled, "ruin my life's work?"

"I've looked at that water through a microscope, you mass murderer. There's animals in there that would make a saber-toothed tiger look like a house cat. Monsters, they are. Horrible ones. Vicious ones."

"If they were looking up through that microscope, I can imagine what they're saying about you, too."

The Jack Benny troupe have long been a Sunday-night family affair. Their Hooper has been consistently high and I bet the royalties from this little opus (hold tight, Benny) they'll be on top for a long time to come. One of the reasons for this success is the likable man with the strange name.

If Rochester didn't believe implicitly that "if you laugh, the world laughs with you," and if you weep it's a one-man job, he'd be a gone comedian.

He prefers crowds, having kept them laughing with him since he started as a chorus boy in 1919. He depends largely for his wide acclaim upon two factors—his ready repartee and his singularly rasping voice.

It was Hall Johnson who summed up Rochester's tonal peculiarity as "gritty glottis."

When he appears to be most serious, Rochester is likely to spring a gag. And frequently, when he is very grave about a subject, he will be grinning from ear to ear. In any case, a laugh is never far behind.

Although he is partial to his radio name, acquired when he went on the Jack Benny show in 1937, his real name is Eddie Anderson. He is a native Californian, born in Oakland. Even in San Francisco schooldays his voice and his feet were acting up. But he stuck out two years of high school before he quit to make his first professional appearance in the chorus of a show called "Struttin' Along." Vintage 1919. In that show, and throughout the intervening years, Eddie injected ad-lib gags and gestures that delighted the people across the footlights.

But Rochester takes his work seriously. Years of vaudeville, song-and-dance routines with rolling eyes and limbering legs—none of them have interfered with his natural acting ability.

Edgar Bergen was born in Chicago on February 16, 1903. While still in grammar school he learned that he had a flexible voice and a gift for mimicry. But it was a ten-cent book on the secrets of ventriloquism that started Bergen on his career.

A persistent youngster, Bergen found that the main secret was practice. Young Bergen's capers with his nondescript dummy kept numerous friends entertained. After he finished school, he was offered a vaudeville tour and thus Charlie McCarthy was born.

After playing several seasons, Bergen entered Northwestern University and paid his tuition for a B.A. degree in 1927 by playing week-end engagements and vacationtime Chautauquas with Charlie.

When a tour of Sweden was completed (including a command performance for the royal family), Bergen returned to the United States as a vaudeville and night-club headliner. It was Rudy Vallee who persuaded Bergen to have a try at radio in a guest spot on his show. The one performance became a four-month run and this later turned into what has been one of the most popular shows

in radio history. Bergen and McCarthy became—and are—by-words in ventriloquism.

Familiar Bergen and Charlie routines go like this:

Special guests at the Edgar Bergen-Charlie McCarthy show were members of the University of Illinois team, in California for the Rose Bowl game. As might be expected, Charlie took occasion to give the boys the benefit of his backlot gridiron experience, advising them how to win the game:

“You know,” said Charlie, “Bergen would make a wonderful man for your team, in case anything should happen that Dwight Eddleman can’t play.”

“Eddleman’s our star punter,” said halfback Buddy Young. “How do you figure Mr. Bergen could take his place?”

“I’ll show you,” cackled Master McC. “I’m gonna ask him for two bits—then watch him kick!”

Charlie McCarthy had been installed as official mascot of the Chicago White Sox, and to seal the bargain, Jimmy Dykes, then the manager, presented Charlie and Edgar with the first ball of the season.

“Don’t I get a bat, too?” inquired Charlie.

“What do you want a bat for?” asked Bergen.

“I want to feel at home, so many of my relatives are bats!”

“Directing Red Skelton,” says S. Sylvan Simon, “is like packing a trunk. You always have twice as much stuff as you have room for. You start with a carefully worked out schedule and a perfectly timed script. On the very first scene (and on every one thereafter), Red comes up with an idea for a bit of business or a line of funny dialogue.

“‘But we haven’t room for it, Red,’ I protest.

“‘It won’t take but a minute,’ Skelton insists. ‘Look, to go like this. . .’

“It is too good to ignore. We include it in the scene. Then comes the question, what will we drop out to make room for it?

“‘Oh, well,’ I think, ‘we’ll make that up by dropping out something later.’

"That never works. The next scene finds Red once more popping up with a new and funny bit which we add. He is a veritable fountain of comedy lines and business. One gag line reminds him of another, and that one of still one more.

"To make it more complicated, Red doesn't always give warning when he is about to throw in an impromptu bit of business. He does it right in the middle of a 'take' and the cast, trying to keep from laughing, misses cues.

"Then we have to rehearse, retime, relight, and often reset the camera to allow for the new business. Once more we cut some other piece of action out of plan to make up that footage.

"We try to forestall the difficulty by allowing a certain amount of slack to be taken up by these added impromptu situations and lines. That works out to a degree but there is no end to them.

"And I'm getting the habit myself. I find myself thinking of gags and comedy lines when I'm away from the studio. And then I have to remember that I've got a script that is filled with them, and a star who is bubbling over with them, and it occurs to me that with the two of us adding footage to the picture, we'd never get finished.

"But there's never a dull moment in the day. Red keeps 'em laughing and if he can make us laugh, he will do the same for the public."

Getting into show business was as easy as falling down a flight of steps for Red. "It was my tenth birthday in the old hometown of Vincennes, Indiana," he says, "and I saw a medicine show. Fascinated, I decided to join it, telling the Doc I could sing and play a guitar. But the Doc had no ear for my music and sent me out into the crowd to sell his bottles of Elixir. Running back to the platform for a new supply, I stumbled on the steps and went into a nose dive. The crowd roared and I was hired, as a diver. I've been falling in and out of trouble ever since."

Red, whose father was a famous circus clown who died shortly before his son was born, has one of show business's weirdest backgrounds. He really intended to become a lion tamer! But he, too, ended up as a clown.

He took the usual course of showboats, burlesque, radio, and films, making his picture debut in 1939's "Having A Wonderful Time." Since then his films have been distributors' dreams.

However, success has not changed Red's spontaneity. "If I've said or done anything to hurt anyone's feelings, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. God bless you and keep you. I only wish I were able to." The tag line is one of those Skelton irrepressibles.

While Red was entertaining a colored cavalry division before they left for overseas, Joe Louis, the champ, who was an Army sergeant at the time, walked over to Red and said, "I haven't any authority to do this, but I want to thank you for coming up."

"Boy, was I proud to shake that mighty fist," says Skelton.

After the show, Joe knocked Red for a loop by saying, "You've changed the heart of every man here five hundred per cent." It was the first show that had been given the colored troops. But out of his own pocket Joe paid five hundred dollars a month for three months to bring two hundred colored girls from Kansas City so that the boys could dance with them.

Skelton goes down from time to time to a little burly house on Main Street in Los Angeles just to see himself as he was before pictures made him famous.

Because of his MGM picture contract, Red is a late starter in the television field. But with his genius for mimicry, pantomime, and character representation it is no secret that he will come in with a bang!

Bob (ex-soldier in grease paint—ski nose—son of Crosby) Hope was born with a dimple in his chin in London, England, May 29, 1903. He has always said that the first twenty years of his life were the hardest. It was during this period that he was known as Lester Townes Hope, son of Mr. and Mrs. William Henry Hope.

At thirteen he made his debut as a boy soprano, singing "The End of a Perfect Day" at a concert in Cleveland, Ohio, where the family had moved from England. After the first few bars he slid into an uncertain alto and ended up as an immature baritone. The audience howled. Lester left 'em laughing even then.

There is not a great deal known about his childhood. Most of his teachers didn't live to tell the tale and the ones the neighbors relate aren't printable here. His school record each year was used as a torch to light the fireplace in early fall. This destroyed any evidence that might have been used by Crosby at a later date. Lester worked as a clerk in a motor company, tried professional boxing, and even worked as a newspaper reporter. Between scoops he took tap-dancing lessons.

Dancing gave him a chance to break into show business. "Fatty" Arbuckle, then an outstanding comedy star, was playing Cleveland and needed an act for his show. Hope and a friend, George Byrnes, auditioned as a hoofing team. Arbuckle hired them.

After this engagement, the hoofers joined a touring musical show. They danced, worked in blackface, and Hope sang in a quartet and doubled on the sax. At the close of the show, Hope and Byrnes had enough experience to go it alone in vaudeville.

After trouping around for several months, the duo found themselves in New York on a bill with Daisy and Violet Hilton, the Siamese twins. One night their manager told them they were to audition for a new musical. They reported for the audition and found that the judges included such people as Eddie Dowling, Kate Smith, Ruby Keeler, and Smith and Dale. But Hope and Byrnes were signed for the show, "The Sidewalks of New York."

After the show closed its run, the team returned to vaudeville and went on tour. Hope realized that a dancing act, unless it was sensational, offered slim hope for a stage career, so the partners decided to work out an act in Chicago. They booked Newcastle, Indiana, to break the jump from New York to Chicago.

The night they opened, the manager asked Hope to announce to the audience that Marshall Walker and his Whiz Bang Revue would appear at the theater the following week. Hope agreed. He tried out a series of Scotch jokes on the audience and although out of breath from dancing, Bob was a terrific hit. That is probably why every dancer you see today, after he finishes the first part of his routine, must introduce his next number, out-of-breath and gasping, thinking he too might turn out to be a comedian. You

can't really blame him for having hope. Hope himself had hope.

Bob bade good-by to his partner and went to Cleveland to open his act. Socially it was a click, but financially—well here's the way Bob tells it:

"Before long, I was four-thousand dollars in debt, I had holes in my shoes, I was eating doughnuts and coffee, and when I met a friend one day who bought me a luncheon featuring beefsteak, I had forgotten whether you cut steak with a knife or drank it out of a spoon."

During the next six months Hope paid off this debt and accumulated five thousand dollars. He was now independent and ready for the big time.

Success followed like shots from an automatic rifle. He was signed for three years with the RKO circuit as a headliner. He took a film test for Pathé—and still swears the test broke the company. Next, he was signed for the stage show "Ballyhoo." Another vaudeville tour and then into "Roberta." During this show, Hope loaned Fred MacMurray his hat and cane to make a screen test for Paramount. Other stage shows such as "Ziegfeld Follies" and "Red, Hot, and Blue" followed. Radio was ready to "discover" him and give him the air.

Hollywood and the picture industry followed close by. Bob packed up his missus, ex-night-club singer Dolores Reade, and was off to Hollywood for "The Big Broadcast of 1938." One sensational film followed another, including the fabulous "Road" series, which took him to such exotic places as Morocco, Zanzibar, Singapore, and, ultimately, to Utopia.

His first three books—written rehearsals for radio shows—recording dates, pictures, and personal appearances, have all been best sellers. *They've Got Me Covered* was the first, *I Never Left Home* followed, and then the witty tome, *So This Is Peace*.

Hope's been on the top of the Hooper Heap long enough to feel at home there.

Oh, yes, he has another business, Hope Metal Products, Inc., of Cleveland; he's listed as president. There's a commercial interest, as you may know also, in a baseball team.

Recently in New York I congratulated him on doing one of his best shows. "That's fine, Bill—I'm glad you liked it—we only had fifteen writers on it."

Every Hope broadcast and every Hope picture has nimble wit involving Bing Crosby. So do all personal appearances. When Bob was in Spokane, Washington, birthplace of Bing, he opened his molologue with, "Spokane is famous for two things, its lumber industry and the fact that Crosby no longer lives here."

Hope gets a kick out of living. He wants bad luck for no one. Says Hope: "It's really a waste of time. My only aim in life is happiness. I'm a 'Happiness' boy. To achieve happiness you must be in harmony with your friends and neighbors. In other words, you must guard against mean and disparaging thoughts and remarks. I'm happiest when I hear laughter," he continues, "it's a pleasant sound. It keeps you young and gay and full of life. I never get bored."

Frank Sinatra recently upbraided Hope for making cracks on the singer's physique.

"I'm developing a middle-age spread," Frankie proudly announced. "Take a look—don't you think I have a little bulge right here?"

"You do have a little bulge at that—it reminds me of an air bubble in a tube of macaroni," was the Hopism.

Hope's ability to ad-lib or fashion a laughable quip to fit any occasion is outstanding. But while most performers don't like to work with such actors, they enjoy Hope's antics. They all say where there's life or television there's Hope and vice versa.

One of his best was his explanation of the California Gold Rush. He claims they found upon arrival that it wasn't gold at all—"The California Chamber of Commerce had buried Florida oranges in the foothills."

Trading gags with Eddie Bracken about a guest appearance, Hope cracked: "Just think, on that day I'll have two sponsors. I'll probably have to brush my teeth with gasoline."

Arthur Godfrey, the living violation of every comedy rule or

formula, has been termed everything from the "Singular Mr. Godfrey" to the "Huckleberry Finn of Radio." Actually he's just Arthur Godfrey, a guy with a cheery voice who talks to his listeners about everything that occurs to him (including racial intolerance) and ribs his sponsors unmercifully.

He ad-libs comments, grabs a ukulele to strum a tune, starts pounding the piano. He may break into a little homespun philosophy from the Godfrey school of thought, or he may drop a few dictums on the international scene. Whatever it is, the fans love it. Godfrey now holds 7 hours and 45 minutes of the CBS week.

He is murder on the carefully written blurbs of his advertisers. He keeps them around merely as groundwork and then builds up his own commercial. He kids the copywriters and the product—but the things he mentions sell.

Once he was plugging a certain fur store with a stuffed polar bear at its doors. Godfrey called it the store "at the sign of the dirty polar bear." They loved it and fur sales boomed.

It seems that the more outrageous he gets, the more he pleases listeners who are in the noontime mood when tempers are nothing to trifle with.

The forty-seven-year old redhead identifies himself with his audience and his listeners feel that he is one of them. Being human, they love it.

Godfrey was born in 1903. He ran away from home at fifteen. Since then he's been a coal miner, architect's office boy, Navy radio operator, insurance and cemetery-lot salesman, taxi driver, vaudeville performer, radio announcer, and breeder of dogs, horses, and blooded cattle.

Godfrey found his life work by getting angry. It was early one morning while he was going about his usual business in Washington, putting on records and telling people what time it was in humdrum succession. At that time he was billed as "Red Godfrey, The Warbling Banjoist." Then something happened.

Tossing caution to the airwaves he muttered, "This is a monotonous business." Realizing the impact, suddenly he plunged in where others quaked. He told his audience what he thought of the music, kidded the advertisers, and let drop a few pearls of

wisdom. Godfrey knew he'd be fired. But instead he became Washington's outstanding radio figure—soon, the favorite of the nation.

Arthur has a lot of hobbies and keeps getting new ones. His favorite is aviation. One morning, talking from WJSV studios in Washington, he hit on a "cute idea" to test his audience strength. Any listener who dropped around the airfield after the show, he announced, would be given a free ride in one of his planes. Two-hundred-and-fifty persons showed up. And they all got that promise fulfilled.

Arthur is a big fellow, tips the beams at 185 pounds, and is one inch short of six feet. He has blue eyes, a big chin, a mop of red hair, and an annual income of almost a million. He's married, lives with his wife and children on a farm in Virginia.

His freckled face has beamed teacups full of personality into TV cameras. When CBS presents its color television to the public, no telling how far the formidable Godfrey will go!

Here is a typical Godfrey discourse, this one on women:

"All my life I've campaigned against women's hats. I've fought the menace in all its stages. I was in there swinging when women went through the over-the-one-eye stage, when hats looked like inverted soup plates and trash baskets, when live mice trotted around atop the ladies' heads, when hats were made out of lumber shavings, old socks, overshoes, toothpaste tubes, shaving brushes, and used radio parts.

"I just took a good look at the new fall and winter hats, and now I'm through. A man can stand just so much.

"'What cooks here?' I asked myself. 'There must be something to this. Why does a woman crawl out of bed in the morning, unwind ten pounds of aluminum gimmicks from her hair, squeeze into a two-way stretch, paint her toenails, pull out all of her eyebrows and paint on new ones, shellac her hair until it points straight up, tuck a little amulet of perfume into her bosom, put on a pair of shoes with no toes or heels, and go out walking even on a hot summer day wearing a silver-fox cape?'

"I'm reconverting, too. From now on, watch Godfrey's hats.

They'll express character and mood. I'm tossing my inhibitions over my shoulder.

"And I'm not going to stop at hats, either. I've just as much personality in my toes as the next one, I'll have you know. After this, watch Godfrey's toes. They're going to stick out all over the place.

"I'm going to give this girdle business a fling, too. If girls have that 'secretary spread' problem, how about the 'boss bulge'? Yep, I'm ordering a girdle today. From now on, watch Godfrey's—well, you just watch!

"I've been practicing this eyebrow technique, too. Got me a little kit with a pair of tweezers and lots of other stuff. Just as soon as the bleeding stops and I can see again I'm going to give it another try.

"I have a feeling my friends will hardly know me after this transformation. Just wait till they see the NEW Godfrey! I'll be supple as a buggy whip in my new two-way stretch, with my eyes just beaming thousands of watts of personality and invitation—with my toes sticking daintily out of my size twelves—the alluring fragrance of 'Devour Me Dearest' wafting out of my ears—and those new, expressive hats. Oh, those hats!"

Joe ("Wanna Buy a Duck?") Penner came to comedy success by the devious route of being a boy soprano, a messenger, a violinist, a piano salesman, a clerk, and a mind reader's assistant. Born in Nayeckkereck, Hungary, in 1904, he came to America when he was six.

Joe got his first taste of the American stage when he won an amateur contest in Detroit imitating Charlie Chaplin. This experience turned the young comic into a rather ambitious amateur and he took part in scores of contests in and around Detroit.

Leaving high school before graduation, he went to work in the Ford factory. If it hadn't been for a mind reader with a traveling troupe, Joe might never have gone further in his comedy career. But the mind reader needed an assistant and Joe volunteered to take the engagement for one night. A comedian on the same show

failed to show up for his spot and Joe got that job, too. His impromptu lines and his comic gestures were so good that a Broadway talent scout sitting in the audience brought Joe to New York where he was featured in the Greenwich Village Follies.

Introduced to radio by Rudy Vallee in July of 1933, Joe had his own show by October of that year. In 1934 he was voted America's outstanding radio artist. Children and adults alike listened to him avidly, imitating his infectious lisping style. He had made himself a "character."

Hollywood called him to play in "College Rhythm" that same year. It was the first of Joe's many successful films.

The comedy world and all who love it mourned the premature death of Joe Penner in 1941.

Ed Gardner began playing the role of Archie in that high-class radio production known as "Duffy's Tavern" because there was no available actor in New York who sounded more like a mug than Ed. He had to give himself the job.

Two characters were needed for one episode in the Duffy series; one a suave and polished gentleman, the other a mug. During auditions to select an actor for the gentlemanly role, Ed read the mug's lines. When the time came to cast the mug, none of the actors could compete with Gardner, the director, who to this day insists he was merely himself. People who know Gardner away from the microphone declare there is very little difference between the Ed of real life and the Archie of Duffy's. There is, however, nothing dumb about Gardner. In radio circles he is recognized as one of the cleverest directors and producers. He's one actor who was able to afford a swimming pool long before he went into the big-income brackets as a comedian.

Gardner was born in Astoria, Long Island, on June 29, 1904. The family home was a flat over a butcher shop, and the family name was Poggenburg. Little Eddie Poggenburg grew up much the same as the other kids in Astoria, playing ball in the streets, hitching rides on ice trucks, and chalking insults to teachers and cops on fences and doors of vacant buildings.

His mother felt that Ed needed a touch of culture, so insisted that he take piano lessons. He did, and then at the age of four-

teen got a job playing in a neighborhood saloon. The pay was small but the bartender was generous with the free lunch. Eddie kept the job until his mother learned what he was doing and dragged him out of the tavern by the ear.

Duffy's, with its varied but perhaps typical set of characters, is patterned after this tavern.

Dennis Day became a leading personality and comedian in his own right when his program "A Day in the Life of Dennis Day" rose to prominence several years ago.

Dennis was born Eugene Dennis McNulty in New York City, May 21, 1917, third child in a family of five boys and one girl. His parents came from County Mayo, Ireland.

While attending Manhattan College in New York, Dennis was featured with the college glee club, and it was then that he made his first radio appearance. Upon graduation, he enrolled in Columbia University's School of Law but was prevented from attending by serious illness. Recovering, he turned to singing as a profession, and auditioned for a radio station, where he was promptly given his own program.

On his first show Mary Livingstone heard him, and as a result Jack Benny sent for Dennis and listened to him sing. The rest is radio history. Day remained with Benny five seasons prior to enlistment in the Navy, in May, 1944. While he was originally hired as a tenor vocalist on the Benny show, Dennis was given imitations, impersonations, and even deep-rooted characterizations to perform. He took them all in equal stride and amazed even the seasoned trouper, Benny, with his excellent presentations.

Possessed of a romantically beautiful singing voice and a childish and bewildering air of naïveté, he has combined music and comedy almost effortlessly to become one of the important characters on a great variety show and an engaging master of his own program.

"Here's Morgan"—not Morgan the pirate, nor Morgan the financier, but Morgan the comedian, who is as versatile in his field as his namesakes were in theirs.

According to Henry Morgan, he was born of mixed parentage

—a man and a woman—and first saw the light of day in New York City in 1915. Henry was born the day before April Fool's Day. He figures this gave him a head start on most comedians and practical jokers.

After finishing high school in New York, young Morgan got himself a job as a page in one of the local New York radio stations. At seventeen, he was making the sum of eight dollars a week guiding sightseers around the studios. His off-the-cuff comments and humorous remarks made such an impression that it was only a short time before he was working as an announcer.

Announcing jobs in New York, Philadelphia, Duluth, and Boston followed; then Morgan returned to New York to launch his own series of comedy programs.

A comedian's comedian who was once sponsored by Fred Allen, Henry is a master dialectician, attributing his ability to the fact that he worked alone for years and played the roles of German, French, British, and Russian characters. Each time he introduced a new character, he would spend weeks practicing accent and mannerisms until he was perfect. As he explains, he had to be good or forget about being a comedian.

After making the film "This is New York" in 1948, Morgan confined his activities to a few guest appearances. Early in 1949, he and NBC got together with an idea for a radio show and television program. The idea looked good and on Sunday night, March 11, "The Henry Morgan Show" went on the air.

Morgan writes most of his own script. His ability to keep his style original and fresh without resorting to the "Joe Miller" type of gag has long been a reason for his success.

Morgan has had a long series of sponsor troubles. His caustic ad-lib remarks irked many a client. But Henry is from the new comedy school and this is his way of making you laugh. At this writing Morgan's back in TV—sans sponsor trouble.

Another dialectician whose forte has been radio is Parkyakarkus. Legally known as Harry Einstein, Parky, as he was affectionately called, has roved the vaudeville, radio, and movie circuits. Though he has not hit the top in the comedy field, Parky has

been a featured character on the Cantor show, the Jolson show, and finally his own show.

Parky believes in the pun, thinking it shows a quick-to-the-point wit and produces instant laughter. The comedian's slogan during the early forties was "Parkyakarkus in the White House."

"Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise."

That pretty well sums up the philosophy behind the career of Marie Wilson, pretty blonde who plays the title role in "My Friend, Irma."

Armed with a spic-and-span diploma from her dramatic teacher, Marie visited Hollywood casting offices, prepared to carve herself a niche beside Bernhardt and Duse. She discovered the hard way that dramatic artists were a dime a dozen in the film city, but that good comedians were somewhat scarcer than molars in poultry. Marie promptly resolved that if smart actresses were not in demand, she was going to become the dumbest one in town. She did—as the classic dumb blonde she has risen to fast stardom.

Marie's home town is Anaheim, California. She was born there on December 30, 33 years ago. Attending school, Marie dreamed of a theatrical career, but kept mum. School dramatics got along without her, and recitations in the family parlor were never part of her girlhood.

But when she was fifteen, Marie decided she was ready for Hollywood. The next few years made it painfully apparent that Hollywood was not ready for her. Between studio visits, she began taking dramatic lessons with Sandy Saunders, who deemed Miss Wilson's talents well worth developing. In fact, Miss Saunders was so sold on Marie's potentialities that for a time, when Marie's income was negligible, the lessons were "on the house."

Her coach's faith was justified when Marie was signed for a comedy role in "Miss Pacific Fleet," and on the basis of her performance, landed a Warner Brothers contract.

Back when Ken Murray had his own air show, Marie performed as guest comedian in one of her few air engagements before her current "My Friend Irma" series. In 1942, Murray, casting his "Blackouts Revue," decided that Marie was perfect for his

leading-lady role. She remained his leading lady for the next seven years! And what a leading lady.

As Irma, Marie is a blonde with the face of an angel and the brain of a mouse. Not overeducated, she is startlingly naïve at times. At other times, her native kindness and sense of justice lead to solutions of problems that baffle her convention-tied friends. The result is a program which last year was well toward the top of the Hooper Heap—and a nationally popular film. Marie is becoming an institution!

Joan Davis became the Queen of American Comedy for a period via the radio route. However, her style, presentation, and basic material was such that the American public tired of it. Joan came from vaudeville stage where she was teamed with her ex-husband, Cy Wills, in an act known as Davis and Wills. Cy, when Hollywood beckoned his better half, joined the staff of writers who prepared Joan's nonsensical radio schemes. Her high-pitched voice and comic facial expressions made Joan a lovable and laughable character.

Joan made films from 1934, when she appeared in a short, until the late forties. Some that are most remembered by her public include "Time Out for Romance," "You Can't Have Everything," "Thin Ice," "My Lucky Star," and "Two Latins from Manhattan."

Born in St. Paul, Joan played with a local dramatic and school group before Cy Wills came into the picture. He had been a nonprofessional until the time they joined forces.

Joan has not as yet been tapped for television. It is hard to figure whether her comedy, which is similar in a way to that of Cass Daley, Betty Hutton, and Martha Raye, would tire the viewer as it did the listener. Only time will tell.

One sequence that was sustained on her radio shows was her man-chasing antics. This led to one of her later films, "She Gets Her Man."

Joan's bons mots are stylized and describe her particular touch better than our words can:

Joan was telling Harry von Zell about a nightmare she'd had.

"I dreamt I was at the Palladium and a Marine was chasing me all over the place. Round and round we went. I was only one step ahead of him."

"Gosh, that's an awful dream," agreed Harry.

"Yeah," continued Joan, "I gotta go see my doctor and get a prescription."

"To make you sleep sounder, huh?" Harry asked.

"No," Joan replied firmly, "to make me run slower."

As Andy Russell was comforting Joan one night she sighed: "Gee, Andy, you always make me feel good. It's too bad you're at such a difficult age."

"Difficult age?" asked the singer.

"Yeah," Joanie retorted, "too young to marry and too old to adopt!"

Joan Davis was telling announcer Harry von Zell how she went to San Pedro with Cousin Mamie to meet the latter's husband, who was returning from overseas.

"It was really a touching sight," Joan sighed. "They stood there . . . his hand clutching Mamie's shoulders, and Mamie's hand clutching his mustering-out pay."

The sweet career in comedy which belongs to Eve Arden started when she was a mere sixteen. But success was not a come-easy game for the attractive actress—there were many years when fame beckoned, only to have Eve trip while reaching for it.

As the cinema's unchallenged caustic queen, Eve Arden is always in demand. Comes a role for a brassy dame (but one not too hard on the eyes), and Eve is at once penciled in for the part. Eve is a "type," and that is a sure-fire concomitant of success in show business.

The rolls of the Mill Valley Grammar School betray that Eve started out as Eunice Quedens, under which questionable handle she made her bow before the Outdoor Art Club as a gangling seven-year-old with a dialect rendition of an item entitled "No Kicka My Dog."

Still gangling, but grown shapely, too, Eve has salted and enlivened every show she's ever appeared in.

Eve's first job in the theater was with the stock company at the Alcazar in San Francisco. She just walked into the place and asked Henry Duffy, the producer, for a job. She stayed a year and a half, and her salary rose from \$35 a week to a munificent \$50. It wasn't the college education she had planned on, but it was educational.

In 1936, after several years of spadework touring in the miniature Bandbox Repertory Theater, Eve got her big break, a featured role in Shubert's "Ziegfeld Follies." Broadway pronounced her a success and in 1938 she did a second edition of the Follies. In 1942 she played in the Danny Kaye musical, "Let's Face It." After another year in New York with the show, Eve returned to California to settle down in her new home and a picture career. Eve has already graced more than fifty pictures, with meaty roles in such hits as "Mildred Pierce," "Night and Day," "Voice of the Turtle," and "Goodbye, My Fancy."

Eve Arden was too good a comedienne for radio to neglect, and she was signed for a show with Ken Murray and Russ Morgan. A show with Danny Kaye followed but neither of the experiences netted her a feeling of having found the right size niche in radio. However, when she appeared as guest star with Jack Haley on NBC's "Sealtest Village Store," in 1945, she made such a hit that she became a regular, sharing the star billing with Jack.

Today, she has her own highly successful radio show, "Our Miss Brooks." As the beloved teacher of Harrison High, the everlasting pursuer of a biology professor, and the scourge of her principal, Eve's got a rising Hooper on her capable hands.

In a world where most wolves are male, Vera Vague has succeeded in creating the character of a wolf-woman. Purely for comedy, Vera has made the predatory female a popular addition to movie and radio funmaking.

Behind "Vera Vague," like Joan Davis a scatterbrained, man-chasing maid, is Barbara Jo Allen, a quiet, reserved actress who can troupe with the best of them. As a matter of record, she has played many serious roles. But since she created Vera her public won't permit her to play any other part!

Born in New York City, Miss Allen spent much of her early childhood on her father's estate at Goshen, New York. When she was nine years old, her mother died, and the child came to Los Angeles to live with an aunt and uncle. During her school years, Barbara worked in dramatics with little-theater groups. When she graduated from college, Barbara, toured Europe, making her professional debut in London. On her return to the U.S., she toured in "The Shanghai Gesture" with Florence Reed, and in "Wives and So Forth" with Charles Ruggles. Years of radio work followed, including the "One Man's Family" show.

Vera Vague, her most famous character, was born after the actress visited a woman's club and, on her return, impersonated a fluttery matron she had glimpsed there. It was so funny that the character was tried out on an NBC employees' broadcast. Instantly it was a hit, and Vera Vague appeared on the Signal Carnival, Chase and Sanborn, Bop Hope, and Rudy Vallee programs, and then was given her own show.

While appearing in Columbia's feature-length comedy, "Snafu," adapted from the George Abbott stage hit, Barbara decided to drop her own name and, for all professional purposes, became Vera Vague. "The fans want it that way," laughed Vera, "and after all, my career is in their hands."

They laughed at Hattie McDaniel years ago when she said she was going to be a successful actress. They told her she's better stick to her cooking and ironing and be satisfied.

But not only has she one of the most popular daily programs on the air today, she is also the only Negro ever to win an Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences award.

Hattie was born in Wichita, Kansas, on June 10, 1898. When she was two, the family moved to Denver, Colorado. She was graduated from grade school there and attended East Denver High School two years.

Hattie joined Professor George Morrison's Negro orchestra as a singer, touring some of the leading vaudeville circuits with the band. When a booking ended in Milwaukee, she accepted a job as a maid at Sam Pick's Suburban Inn. Her pay was to be one

dollar a night and tips. However, Hattie was ambitious and was soon singing again.

She stayed at the Inn more than two years. When there was no place for her as a featured performer in the floor show, she returned to her position as a maid.

In 1930 she made up her mind to try motion pictures. Some friends were driving to Los Angeles, so she went with them. She obtained extra work, and her faith in her future never wavered.

Her first bit was with Ruth Chatterton in a Warner Brothers production. The role was so tiny that Hattie doesn't even remember the name of the picture, but it marked a turning point for her. A part in "Judge Priest" with the late Will Rogers gave her a real chance. Followed "The Little Colonel," with Shirley Temple, and she was on her way to fame.

After her Academy Award performance in "Gone With the Wind," Hattie appeared in "Maryland," then made an extensive personal appearance tour of the East, South, and Midwest. Returning to Hollywood, she signed with Warners' and was cast in a long line of successful pictures.

She doesn't mind having people laugh at her, but she never intends to let them feel sorry for her. And talk about Hoopers—Hattie's daily "Beulah Show" on CBS is doing mighty, mighty fine.



5



SEEING IS BELIEVING

Movie comedies are as old as movies themselves. Back in 1895 a film entitled "Wash Day Troubles," directed by Edmund Kuhn, was produced, and many claim that the slapstick comedies that appeared in later years were actually born on that primitive reel. The comedy films of the next fifteen years were made to amuse unsophisticated people. The spirit of comedy was free and unrefined. Nudity, or modification thereof, physical mishaps, obesity—all were the basis for practical jokes.

It was a milestone in movie comedy when Mack Sennett became a director for Keystone in 1912. Mack had been quite an actor, but he was an even better director. Comedy stars under his direction included Charles Chaplin, Mabel Normand, Mack Swain, and Fatty Arbuckle.

In 1914 the picture, "A Fool There Was," brought vamp Theda Bara to the fore. Although this was not a comedy, it was the beginning of publicity build-ups for both star and picture. It created an artificial personality for the star, and for the picture exaggerated appeal. This policy has been used by producers ever since, sometimes unmercifully, to build up both star and picture in order to make double box-office appeal.

1914 saw five Keystone comedies produced. The casts read like a Who's Who of slapstick comedy. In "Making a Living," for

example, there were Charlie Chaplin, Henry Lehrman, Alice Davenport, Minta Durfee, and Chester Conklin.

Chaplin directed "His New Profession," which featured Charley Chase and himself. Later he directed two other comedies in this group, "Getting Acquainted," featuring Mabel Normand, Mack Swain, Phyllis Allen, Edgar Kennedy, and Charlie himself; and "The Rounders," with Fatty Arbuckle, Minta Durfee, Phyllis Allen, Al St. John, Charley Chase, and Chaplin.

Chaplin and Sennett were feuding during most of these pictures. Both had ideas of their own as to what was funny and how it was to be filmed. Sennett's comedy was fast moving, while Chaplin aimed for slow motions to show himself off. In 1915 Chaplin developed the baggy-pants pathetic type of character. "The Tramp" was his first picture, "A Woman" followed, then "The Bank," and finally "Police."

In 1916 Sennett produced "His Bitter Pill," the first burlesque on Western films, which were rapidly growing in popularity with the moviegoing public. The hero of this picture, Mack Swain, later gained note with Charles Chaplin in "The Gold Rush."

The format for movie comedies did not change much during the next few years. In 1919 "Wild and Woolly" was produced by Famous Players—Lasky. This was another satire on Westerns. In 1920 Hal Roach came into the pictures with the fantastic "High and Dizzy," starring Harold Lloyd and his leading lady, Mildred Davis. The camera's ability to show the impossible made Lloyd a great comedian.

The movies are, and have been for a long time now, one of the greatest influences on how Americans think. They've also done a lot to bring comedy to the home. Too often we take ourselves and our loved ones too seriously. The father becomes a tyrant, the mother becomes a chronic griper, the children, typical hell-raisers and delinquents, because they choose to be. These characters and many others have been regularly depicted in motion pictures, and believe it or not, they have brought out the best comedy in actors like Wallace Beery, Mickey Rooney, Clifton Webb, Monty Woolley, James Gleason, and Alan Hale.

Perhaps, after all, the best excuse or reason for a comedian's

existence is that he makes us laugh at ourselves. He makes us see our everyday histrionics as others see them—silly, laughter-provoking incidents. Our movie comedians have depicted typical family members with all the faults and weaknesses, all the aches and pains and cures that are in our own mothers and dads and sisters and brothers and wives. They make them all seem so pathetic and unreal that they are to be laughed at.

Mack Sennett's great boys, Ben Turpin, Buster Keaton, and Harry Langdon, brought the biggest laughs. They, with Chaplin, were the silent comics, and all but Chaplin were through with the advent of sound. While the world of comedy was rejoicing over its gain, it mourned a little, too, over its loss. For visual comedy, when strictly visual, carries nuances and subtleties of humor that simply are not convincing with sound.

From the year 1911 until early in 1915 the Falstaffian actor, John Bunny, was the greatest and most famous comedian of the day. Born in New York, September 21, 1863, the son of a retired English Navy officer who had migrated to America, Bunny came from eight generations of naval officers. He graduated from St. James High School in Brooklyn, and after a couple of years of odd jobs he joined a minstrel show.

In December, 1910, he went to work for the old Vitagraph company at forty dollars a week . . . and three years later was drawing a thousand dollars weekly, the highest salary in movies up to that time. In 1914 alone he made over 150 comedies, mostly one-reel.

His co-star in most of his pictures was Flora Finch, an English actress. After Bunny's death in April, 1915, she organized her own company and for a number of years turned out the short comedies so popular at that time. She is listed as late as 1938 in the film directory as playing small roles in a number of pictures. There is no record of her death . . . nor is any further information about her available.

People will still tell you that Buster Keaton made the funniest movies ever screened, Bob Hope notwithstanding. He started his theatrical career as a member of "The Three Keatons" (Mom and Pop were the other two) at the age of three.

Buster's first movie was made with Fatty Arbuckle, Sennett directing. Keaton's most distinguishing mark was his straight, dead-pan face. He was called the "Great Stone Face" and it was this complete absence of emotion on his fine, sensitive face which made his antics screamingly comic. He moved stiffly and automatically; his five feet five inches made a perfect automaton. In "Sherlock, Jr.," for instance, Keaton killed 'em by racing along on the handle bars of a motorcycle while blissfully unaware that the vehicle had no driver, flying off said handle bars, crashing through the window of a shack where a young lady was facing certain peril, going through the opposite wall—all the while retaining a stoic countenance. Not a muscle twitched. There was not a shade of emotion from those wide, grave eyes.

Buster made movies up to the middle thirties, gallantly trying to adapt himself to sound. But when the screen gave Buster Keaton a voice, it lost a comedian. During the forties Buster worked for Metro, where he helped construct comedy sequences for Red Skelton. One can predict now that his silent, melancholic stone face will soon brighten the television horizon. In fact, it is beginning to do so now.

Harry Langdon, another Sennett comedian, was as pathetically and tenderly human as he was funny. He was man the child. Man the vulnerable. Man the simple, the naïve, the bewildered. Nor were these qualities ones he had assumed for a comedian's role. Harry Langdon was all of that himself.

He had a childlike body. His feet, like a toddler's, seemed always to be in his way. His hands were chubby and short and soft. His face was soft and emotional and satiny. One of Harry's greatest scenes was done solely with the back of his neck. As he watched a brazen showgirl undress, he registered shock, innocence, disapproval, and disgust with the motions of the back of his neck. He was always shy with women. More than that, he never understood them, he didn't know what a vamp was getting at because he was incapable of being vamped.

He never had more than a vague idea about the scripts of his movies. He never read them. Frank Capra would explain what

he was to do, the effect he was to get from a certain scene and Langdon would improvise in his own bewildered, uncertain manner. In this was his greatest humor. Capra never meddled with it. It stood in greatness.

With sound came the highbrow writers, people who had to explain to the little man his deficiencies in acting. These only brought Harry Langdon down, down to playing mediocre and secondary roles. "He never did really understand what hit him," says Capra. "He died broke and he died of a broken heart. He was the most tragic figure I ever came across in show business."

As the Keystone Cops rushed about, collided with each other, ran mad chases that involved half a city, and while Sennett's bathing beauties posed and made pretty, the agile Mr. Ben Turpin, his mustache twittering, Adam's apple throbbing with emotion, and bulging, crossed eyes gleaming, came upon the scene.

Ben Turpin was visual comedy at its best. His face, his expression, and his whole bearing were the essence of that mysterious ingredient which tickles our funnybones. Voices can never really match it.

Ben died at the age of 71 in 1940, with a host of the Sennett pie-throwing epics to his credit, the most famous, probably, being "A Small Town Idol," or "The Sheik of Araby." People who can remember those free-for-all sessions (Sennett never interfered with anyone's ideas, he welcomed his comics' original ideas and let them act as they pleased while the camera ground on), rarely see anything funny in some of today's mechanical, plotted, hackneyed comedies. For those were the days when an actor couldn't rely on a writer. Those were the days when guys like Ben Turpin couldn't say anything funny. They had to *be* something funny. And they were!

Fatty Arbuckle was destined to be one of the greatest comedians in American history—in a class with Chaplin and Lloyd. But close to the top of his career he was forced to leave comedy as an active performer in the booming moving picture industry. Accused of manslaughter following the death of Virginia Rappe, a film actress,

he was acquitted, but after the trial he never acted in another film.

Fatty Arbuckle was born in Smith Center, Kansas, on March 24, 1887. Clumsy, enormously fat, he capitalized on his glandular difficulties to carve a notable niche for himself in the comedy world. Able to make people laugh at him while yet being sympathetic to him, he became a major figure in the entertainment scene dominated by the silent films. Some of his most important pictures were "Brewster's Millions," "Dollar A Year Man," "Life of the Party," and "Traveling Salesman."

After the scandal, Fatty worked as a director under the name of William Goodrich. His directing and producing credits were even more numerous than his acting ones. Until his early death in 1932 such films as "Keep Laughing," "Moonlight and Cactus," "Anybody's Goat," and "It's A Cinch" kept his touch before the public—even if his wonderful fat body never appeared in them.

Two other comedians of the older school, long popular on the screen, were Slim Summerville and Andy Clyde. Long, shy, commonsensical, sympathetic Slim was born in Calgary, Canada. While still a boy he ran away from home.

In 1913 he ventured into films, being used as an extra, later to graduate into feature roles in the Mack Sennett comedies. Acting and directing for several companies, he made such early films as "The Beloved Rogue," "Hey, Hey Cowboy," "Shannons of Broadway," "Strong Boy," and "Under Montana Skies." His career was a long one and he remained a public favorite throughout many years of homespun, down-to-earth supporting roles.

Andy Clyde was justly famous for his amusing characterizations. A stickler for realism in character, he even used a real beard: During his picture career he appeared in over forty films. Some of his better ones include "My Husband" for Educational and "The Golfers" and "Hello Television" for Mack Sennett. Evidently Sennett picked a title out of the future on that last one!

According to Will Rogers, Marie Dressler was the real queen of movies.

Born in Coburg, Canada, her real name was Leila von Koerber, and being the daughter of a musician, she was constantly

traveling. At the age of fourteen Marie began to troupe herself. For years she traveled all over the country. One of her partners was Sam Bernard, a comedian with trigger wit. They were starred in "The Kings of Carnival." One skit was a take-off on the popular spot of the day—Madison Square Roof Garden. The skit began with a two-minute routine and grew to twenty and more. Bernard would improvise each night and Marie would lead him on. Each act was different and they had as wonderful a time as the audience.

When Weber and Fields split up after several years as a team, Joe Weber asked Marie to come over to the Weber and Fields Music Hall which was at that time south of Herald Square. This famed entertainment spot drew capacity audiences for many years.

In one show Marie was in, Anna Held was the star. Anna's champagne-and-milk-bath publicity was just catching on. Marie mugged and witted the show right away from Anna. Then she went to the great Ziegfeld.

Marie was given a role in the Fields production of "Tillie's Nightmare," and Marie always considered this her one real claim to immortality. It ran about five years and was daily eulogized by both press and public. On this stage play hung all the rest of Marie's theatrical breaks. The movies finally accepted her as a great comedienne and she became a major star.

She danced, she sang, she did burlesque opera, and her mood was as jovial off the screen and stage as it was on. Marie, the great portrayer of Tugboat Annie, died July 28, 1934. The world mourned the loss of a great comedienne.

When Twentieth-Century Fox signed George Jessel as a producer, Hollywood raised surprised eyebrows. Somehow, they had never thought of funnyman Jessel as a high-powered movie producer.

But that was Hollywood's fault, not Jessel's. After all, he had had a background of thirty-five years of varied experience as an entertainer in all the media.

George started as a boy singer with a sideline talent for mimicry and witty monologue. First famous as a comedian, he was later able to win acclaim as a sensitive, serious actor. Not

only had he been a star of stage, screen, and radio, but he had written shows, cast them, budgeted them, staged them. He could also claim authorship of countless successful skits, numerous song hits, several dramatic short stories, a few Broadway plays, and a best-selling autobiography, *So Help Me*.

The "Toastmaster General of the United States" was born April 3, 1898, in New York. Early in life his father had given up the family trade of auctioneering and had left home to become a playwright. He had written "La Belle Marie" and several other plays, then, disillusioned about show business, had become a traveling salesman. When his young son started showing a flair for mimicry, he said, "You will never be an actor as long as I live."

After his father's death in 1908 George and his mother went to live with her parents. One night Grandpa took George to a lodge meeting with him and had him sing there. George needed no further encouragement. From the meeting he went straight to the Imperial Theatre to try to get a job as a singer.

As it happened, the manager had just hired two other boy singers, but he liked George's voice and decided that the three could sing together—as The Imperial Trio. The other two were Walter Winchell and Jack Wiener. Because the Gerry Society forbade children under sixteen to appear on the stage, they sang in the orchestra pit. Salary: \$12.50 per week.

When the manager fired the trio, to cut expenses, he kept George on to sing solo. The sign out in front said: "It's worth five cents alone to hear little Georgie Jessel sing." Nearly thirty years later, Walter Winchell wrote: "And it still goes."

Ambitious to conquer larger fields, George went to see Gus Edwards, the famous sponsor of child talent. He was hired at the age of eleven for a vaudeville act called "School Boys and Girls." From that, he went into the largest and most spectacular vaudeville act up to that time, "Gus Edwards' Song Revue."

Back in New York, he entered motion pictures, appearing in a two-reeler entitled "The Widow at the Races." In 1911, Thomas A. Edison had an idea for talking pictures, and conducted experiments at a New York studio. Gus Edwards arranged for Cantor, Jessel, and Truly Shattuck to be the "talent" for the tests.

After his movie experiments, he teamed up with dancer Lou Edwards in an act called "Two Patches from a Crazy-Quilt." By that time, he had almost, but not entirely, outgrown the awkward stage. This hampered his career. He already had a Broadway reputation—off stage—for wisecracking and sophisticated gags. But on the stage he looked too young for such quips.

Veteran vaudevillian Al White told him, "If you would tell your gags as if they were things you had heard, instead of things you had made up, the audience would believe you and laugh. Why not come on the stage and call up your home and tell these things to your mother?"

Thus, in 1918, was born the famous Jessel routine of "Telephone Conversations with Mama."

After several years as a vaudeville headliner (remember "Jessel's Troubles of 1919 . . . 1920 . . . 1921"?), he found himself succumbing to an urge to produce. With Rufus Le Maire, now a fellow Twentieth-Century Fox executive, he did the musical comedy, "Helen of Troy, New York." Later that same year he became interested in the dramatization of a short story, "The Day of Atonement," by a young writer named Samson Raphaelson, which was destined to revolutionize show business. It was produced on Broadway under the title "The Jazz Singer," with George Jessel in the title role. The play was an immediate and inspiring success, and is one of those classics people still talk about.

In 1927, Warners' asked him to do a picture called "Private Izzy Murphy." He made a countersuggestion, doing "The Jazz Singer." Warners' agreed to buy it for him, if he agreed to do "Private Izzy Murphy."

After making the picture, Jessel went on tour for the next season in "The Jazz Singer," which showed promise of being for him what "Rip Van Winkle" was for Joseph Jefferson; a lifetime vehicle. Then he suddenly realized that a sound-picture version would put the play out of business. Taking that into account, he insisted on a new deal. The details had not yet been ironed out when he reported to the Coast to start work. Discovering that the movie script had a completely different ending from the play, he promptly raised violent objections. The next day, he learned from

the newspapers that Al Jolson was going to do "The Jazz Singer."

George helped start the return to big-time vaudeville with his success in "Show Business," a revue that opened in Los Angeles to phenomenal business, repeated its success in San Francisco, then became a Broadway hit. He was on top of the world again. He's still up there, but now he's on the other side of the lights—as a producer.

Whether Jessel is on the set, acting as at the Friars Club in Hollywood, or romping around the country making personal appearances with his latest productions, his humor is always topical and his presentation *saue*. After the famous crime hearings were completed he is reputed to have said, "No matter what your name may be, we in Hollywood have to change it so the public will recognize it easily. Yet along comes a man with a name like Estes Kefauver and everybody in the country knows him."

He will tell you that one of the first things he learned in show business when he joined the Gus Edwards Revue as a child was how to get along with people. The big and the small, the old and the young, the professional and the nonprofessional, all love him.

For over three decades Al Jolson's star shone brightly in every medium of entertainment. Many times in his career he was called America's greatest entertainer. The high popularity which he enjoyed after many years of semiretirement adds weight to that opinion.

Born Asa Joelson in St. Petersburg, Russia, on May 26, 1886, Al was but a youngster when he came to this country. The Joelson family settled in Washington, D.C., where Al's father became a cantor in a synagogue. He was trained to follow in the footsteps of his father and become the seventh in a direct line of Joelson cantors. The popular tunes of the day, however, had a special appeal for Al.

Al found a job in a café as a singing waiter. Then he advanced to "super" in a local stage production of Israel Zangwill's "Children of the Ghetto." With his brother Harry and a friend named Palmer, he entered vaudeville with a touring company. The threesome

reached the West Coast shortly after the San Francisco fire in 1906. They parted ways when Jolson started to work his way east again as a café entertainer. In New York, an old Negro valet who dressed Al for his stage appearances gave the entertainer an idea which became the turning point of his career.

"Mister Jolson," he said, "why don't you try singin' those songs in blackface?"

Jolson did. And that is how Broadway came to know him.

With such successes as "Bow Sing," "La Belle Paree," "Robinson Crusoe, Jr.," "Sinbad," and "Big Boy," Jolson became a Broadway institution. Customers came early and stayed late. Long after the last curtain had gone down, Al was still entertaining the customers.

After refusing offers from the movies for many years, Jolson finally consented to star in "The Jazz Singer," an epoch-making film which opened the era of successful talking pictures. He became the first and greatest star of early sound pictures.

Jolson's popularity through the years is legendary. "The Jolson Story" broke film attendance records across the country. The "Al Jolson Album," issued right after the phenomenal success of the picture, sold in greater volume than any other record album in history.

The beloved Wallace Beery was much the same in private life and on the screen in at least one respect: his corrugated face and sad, gruff voice created an impression of harshness that was invariably belied by his actions. The toughie was as gentle as a St. Bernard.

After several rough, tough years as an elephant tender in the Ringling Circus, young Wallace Beery went into his first job in the theater, in the chorus of Henry W. Savage's "Babes in Toyland." That was 1904. In those days he must have sung all right, because he went on in "The Balkan Princess," "The Prince of Pilsen," and "The Student Prince." The stage held him until 1913, when he joined the old Essanay Film Company in Chicago.

His success there led him to form his own company, which he

took to Japan. Returning to Hollywood, Beery became a free-lance actor and appeared in such notable pictures as "The Four Horsemen" and "Behind the Door."

In a series of comedies with Raymond Hatton, Beery appeared in a picture called "Now We're on the Air" which awakened his interest in aviation. He became an accomplished pilot and in 1940 acquired his ninth plane and a flying record of seven thousand hours.

The world still remembers Beery's teaming with the unforgettable Marie Dressler in "Min and Bill." A year later in 1931 he won the Academy Award for "The Champ" for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. He received a major Italian award for his characterization in "Viva Villa," in 1934. In later years he made such films as "Ah, Wilderness!" "Salute to the Marines," and "A Date with Judy." Whatever it was—Western, adventure, sea, family, comedy—the man with the great body and the great heart was capable of playing it, and playing it well.

To list even the most important of his more than 250 screen roles would be a formidable task. But Wallace Beery was exhibiting his amazing versatility and his warm hold on fans everywhere until his death.

Your dad and my dad remember Edgar Kennedy best in his first comedy role, "The Better 'Ole," a great silent film. This picture "made" him in the comedy field; and when talking pictures came in he was one of the first to be employed for comedy parts.

Born in Monterey, California, he went on the stage in 1924 to play bit parts in vaudeville and musical comedies. After a few talking pictures, which included "Kid Millions" and "All of Me," Kennedy was a big hit in "Three Men on a Horse." From that point on he appeared in nothing but A pictures.

He has appeared in close to fifty top films, including "Hollywood Hotel," "The Girl From Monterey," and "Captain Tugboat Annie," in addition to dozens of his famous stylized shorts. Playing the patient husband suffering from mother-in-law trouble and a small-brained wife, his inevitable explosion was a cinema highlight. Edgar is a master of the use of face and hands to show broad

emotions. When his patience was controllable no longer, and when he rubbed his great hand over his face, brother, you were prepared to hear a roar that would shake the theater walls.

"You'll never be a success in the theater with a name like Bill Jones," the manager of Boston's Quincy Theatre assured one of his ushers. "You'd better take my name instead."

Billy (DeWolfe) Jones was born in Boston, the son of Welsh parents who were merely visiting there at the time, and who, when he was nine weeks old, took him back to Wales. The next time he saw Boston he was nine years old. His father, a bookbinder, had decided to live there and take out citizenship papers.

By studying the acrobatic dancing acts he saw as an usher and imitating them on the mat at the school gymnasium, Billy worked out a routine of his own. He was practicing it at the theater one Sunday when the manager of Jimmy Connor's band saw him and asked him if he was on the coming week's bill. Flattered, Billy confessed that he was merely an usher. The band signed him, nevertheless, and from \$7.50 a week as Bill Jones, usher, the youngster jumped to \$50 as Billy De Wolfe, thanks to the boss who donated the name.

With two girls, De Wolfe later organized a dancing trio which appeared at the old New York Hippodrome. They were then billed for four weeks in London, but for Billy the four weeks stretched into five years. His partners became homesick and returned to the U.S., but he continued as a single, touring the provinces and playing in almost every European country.

When he returned to New York there was an immediate demand for his services. In the two years that followed he moved back and forth around the states and finally was booked into New York's Raleigh Room, where Winchell and others hailed him as a new find. From there he moved to Radio City's Rainbow Room, where Hollywood personalities returned again and again to applaud his take-offs on Noel Coward plays, and the routine in which he impersonated a complete third-rate night-club floor show, from emcee to chorus.

Billy made an impressive movie debut in "Dixie," before going

into the Navy. Since his return to Paramount he's been kept busy playing in one hit after another, including such films as "Our Hearts Were Growing Up," "Dear Ruth," and "Tea for Two."

In the late thirties the song-patter style of comedy was reborn. Monologists in vaudeville had used this method. After a tiring verbal speech they would put their next piece of business to music. It was funnier and always brighter because of the musical accompaniment. Danny Kaye rejuvenated this method when he launched his big-time New York night-club career, from which setting he received his Broadway show contract and a movie bid.

Danny Kaye was born on January 18, 1913, in the section of Brooklyn known as East New York.

After high school, he became an entertainer on the "borscht circuit," the famous group of resorts in New York's Catskill Mountains. He waited on table, took part in the plays and musicals put on by "semiprofessionals," wore funny hats to cheer depressed guests, and was not above falling into the pool, fully clothed, to get a laugh.

During the winter he lived on what he made in the summer. He tried to see Broadway producers but never got past the advance outposts of secretaries.

In his fourth season on the circuit Danny met Dave Harvey and Kathleen Young, dancers, who taught him how to dance. They made up an act, tried it out at a camp, and made a hit of it. Six months later, A. B. Marcus signed the act for his show, "La Vie Paree." Marcus didn't think Danny was funny, but Harvey and Young refused to sign without him.

Danny sailed with the "La Vie Paree" troupe from San Francisco on February 8, 1934, bound for Tokyo. It was in Tokyo that he first began to piece together a style that he now uses in most of his numbers. "I used to try and help them along by giving them pantomime," he recalls.

Back from the Orient, he became a stooge in the act of Nick Long, Jr., at the Casa Manana. After a tour with Sally Rand, a London engagement at the Dorchester Hotel, and another season on the borscht circuit, he ran into Nat Lichtman, who was doing

a little revue on Fifty-second Street with Max Liebman and Sylvia Fine.

It developed that Sylvia and Danny had grown up together on the same block without knowing each other, that he had often run errands and tended office for her father, the neighborhood dentist. She'd been working at Camp Tamiment with Liebman and they asked him to come along. It was there that they worked up the "Straw Hat Revue," which Shubert brought to Broadway with Imogene Coca. Danny did ten numbers, the show lasted only ten weeks; but he got good notices from the New York critics, a pretty important factor for a young comedian—and he married Sylvia.

His great success later in "Lady in the Dark" would have satisfied most artists, but in addition to his work in the theater, Danny, with the assistance of Sylvia, opened a six-week engagement at La Martinique, doubling there after the theater. The café doubled his salary, then tripled it, then gave him a percentage of the gross. Extra private police had to be hired to keep the customers in line; fifty-dollar tips to headwaiters for tables near Danny were not uncommon. Following this, he went into the Paramount Theatre, where he became the first comedian, in spite of the theater's policy, to remain for five consecutive weeks.

After starring in the Cole Porter-Dorothy and Herbert Fields musical comedy, "Let's Face It," Danny left early in 1943 for Hollywood, to begin a long-term contract with Samuel Goldwyn. His first picture, "Up in Arms," was a sensational world-wide success, and such rousing films as "Wonder Man" and "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" followed. During 1944-45 he became a radio star with his own network show. Since then he has become a comedian of world stature—a favorite of millions.

Danny became a great international variety artist with his appearance at the London Palladium in 1950. He was held over for many weeks beyond his regular contract, and invited back anytime he wanted to divorce himself from Hollywood and the American stage. His compensation for this London engagement was the highest ever paid an American artist, and he showed that whereas many, perhaps most, of our comedians are purely national in appeal, his technique and genius are wider in scope and really international.

In contract to his energetic, high-pressure performances on stage and screen, he is quiet, attentive, and passive in person. Often described as an "overnight sensation," he is anything but that. "What no one seems to realize," Danny says darkly, "is that for twelve years I played every whistle stop in America and beat my brains out all over the world."

Mickey Rooney literally crawled into the spotlight before he was a year old. Parents Joe Yule and Nell Brown were in the midst of one of their own vaudeville acts when Mickey's debut happened. He had escaped the watchful eyes of stagehands, and flashing a big baby grin over the footlights, Mickey sneezed! The audience howled with glee, and toothless Mickey had stolen the show from Mom and Pop.

Before he was two he was a regular member of the family act. In order to comply with New York laws, he was given a special work permit by Governor Alfred E. Smith. Spending most of his time backstage, he soon learned to dance. At five he made his motion-picture debut, playing a midget in "Not To Be Trusted" and a similar spot in a stage revue.

Mickey was probably the greatest scene-stealer in motion pictures, outside of Shirley Temple in her younger days. His pug nose, quick actions, and incessant mugging brought about an immediate reaction from every moviegoer. He was pugnacious but cute and lovable at the same time. And he came close to being a national child hero.

Mickey Rooney was born Joe Yule, Jr., on September 23, 1922. His mother brought him to Hollywood at the time Larry Darmour started producing a series of short film comedies based on Fontaine Fox's tough little cartoon character, Mickey McGuire. He was searching for a dark-haired kid who could look tough and act tough. Little Joe Yule's mother darkened his unruly yellow locks, and while it angered the youngster, it got him a part. His belligerent attitude made the cartoon Mickey McGuire seem a gentle angel.

In 1939 he received a special award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for his characterizations in "Boys Town" and the memorable Hardy Family pictures. In the same

year a nation-wide poll of newspaper readers established him a "King" of the movies, with Bette Davis as "Queen." He also was nominated for the 1939-40 acting award, the first time a juvenile had attained the status of competition with adult stars. In 1943 he won the Academy Award nomination for his performance in "The Human Comedy." Two musicals, "Girl Crazy" and "As Thousands Cheer," offered Rooney in lighter roles, followed by "Andy Hardy's Blonde Trouble," "National Velvet," and "Ziegfeld Follies." Since becoming a full-fledged adult, his roles have been numerous and varied, if less uniquely distinguished.

Motion pictures have been made more important by supporting players than many stars would ever admit. Most such supporting players have been comics. They pop up as scene-stealers, after a heavy dramatic sequence, offering comedy relief. Players such as Mischa Auer, Charles Butterworth, Reginald Gardiner, and William Bendix have brightened many a dark spot on the celluloid. These supporting rascals, as many directors like to call them, are a real reel necessity.

Occasionally the public stands up and claps so hard that the guy or gal buried deep under the glow and glimmer of another reputation finally gets recognition and becomes a star in his own right.

From the guise of leering villain to that of slightly insane funnyman meant the change from obscurity to fame for the sad-eyed Russian, Mischa Auer.

Auer's young boyhood was filled with a succession of tragedies and hardships. Born in St. Petersburg, Russia, he lost his father in the Russo-Japanese War, and his mother, faced with starvation, started out with her small son to seek a new home. After months of wanderings and untold hardships, including the death of his mother, Mischa was brought to America by his grandfather, Leopold Auer, a renowned figure in the American music world.

The older Auer, although a famous musician himself (he taught Zimbalist, Heifetz, and others), was not too disappointed when his grandson preferred the stage to music. Young Auer

majored in literature and the arts at school, and was soon playing small parts in New York stock companies. He came to Los Angeles with a stage company playing "Magda" and while there met Frank Tuttle, the director, who urged him to give the movies a try. Tuttle gave him small parts in all of his pictures.

At first Auer was cast as a heavy and he tells it like this:

"I was usually a leering villain, killed in the first reel. Fortunately, in 1936 Gregory La Cava decided I might do as a phony artist, something between a gigolo and a dilettante, in his picture, 'My Man Godfrey.' That's when I hit the Hollywood mother lode. That one role made a comedian out of me. I haven't been anything else since. It's paid off very well. Do you wonder that I'm flattered when people say I'm mad?"

His most important part was his never-to-be-forgotten part as the dancing teacher in "You Can't Take It with You," but he supplemented this with many another scene-stealing role in a variety of films.

Death in the twisted wreckage of an automobile overtook veteran actor Charles Butterworth, June 13, 1946.

Butterworth was an Indiana newspaperman in his early career but abandoned that for vaudeville, after he had "covered 1,000 lodge and service club meetings and had been served chicken patties and canned green peas at 750 of them."

Butterworth's favorite characterization was that of a vague, befuddled, middle-aged man whose life was one series of serio-comic mistakes. He was fond of telling new acquaintances that his favorite story was "about a white horse"—but he couldn't remember it.

Some of his well-known stage roles included appearances in "Alley Oop," "Good Boy," and "Sweet Adeline." He came to Hollywood in 1930 and appeared in the Winnie Lightner film, "Life of the Party"; "Love Me Tonight"; and a host of others, including such hits as "Magnificent Obsession," "Thanks for the Memory," and "This Is the Army."

Few handsome men are amusing. Few amusing men are

handsome. Reginald Gardiner is the exception who proves both rules.

A fabulous mimic, a fascinating raconteur, a witty sophisticate, a suave actor, a talented painter, an erudite scholar, completely a gentleman, and long the favorite escort of Hollywood glamour girls, he is in a class by himself—either on the screen or off.

According to Reggie himself, "Whatever talent I have, I inherited from my father, who died when I was seven.

"Around sixteen or seventeen, I developed evangelical fervor; I thought I wanted to be a minister. In a roundabout way, it was probably a subconscious manifestation of a desire to carry away an audience."

Aged nineteen, Reggie enrolled in the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, passing the stiff entrance examinations with no trouble whatever.

He went on to appear in thirty-odd London plays and twenty-odd English pictures—"most of which," he is sure, "went either to the Hebrides or the Antipodes, because no one ever saw them." He first faced a U.S. camera in an early Alfred Hitchcock picture, "The Lodger," as an extra.

Reggie admits that his greatest ambition, "which probably never will be fulfilled," is to be a composer of serious, classical music. Meantime he has a firm place as a film comedian—at least a profitable substitute!

When William Bendix stepped into the role of two-fisted, rollicking Riley, a factory worker and head of a typical American family on "The Life of Riley" over NBC, he took another significant step in his phenomenal career. He had "guested" on several programs, but this comedy series marked his initial appearance in broadcasting as the star of his own show.

Born January 14, 1906, on New York's East Side, the only son of an accomplished musician, Bill's first job was as bat boy with the New York Giants. After New York Public School No. 5 and the Townsend Harris Prep were through with him, he became a member of the Henry Street Settlement Players.

Marrying his childhood sweetheart when he was twenty-two, he

went to work as manager of a large grocery store. When the depression came he made another try at acting with the New Jersey Federal Project, gaining first recognition and immediate success in William Saroyan's "The Time of Your Life." When Hollywood called him for "The Woman of the Year," he found himself, quite suddenly, "the actor of the year."

He's been a national favorite ever since. And on or off the screen or radio Mr. Bendix is the same good-natured, likable guy. As Riley, though he may be a henpecked husband, he is essentially a happy man with his brood.

Bob Burns makes you think of the Southwest. He exemplifies a rural Western style of humor, broad in outline. Jack Haley is the typical Broadway type of movie comedian. He can be the leading comic of a stage show; he can be the master of ceremonies for all types of presentations. On the other hand, Jack Carson is the man-about-town type, the lover, the leading man who always says the right (funny) thing at the right time, but never ends up winning the girl. There are as many different types of movie comedians as there are funnymen working for the studios themselves. Eddie Bracken is vibrant, lusty, and full of the old Harry. Not too unlike Alan Young, Eddie is a doer, a go-getter, and who knows . . . might get the girl in the end, if the picture lasts long enough. Keenan Wynn, a product of his own accomplishments and not a leaner on daddy's fame, brought to the screen the natural and sincere type of humor that is found in everyday people. Keenan in many scenes didn't have to "act." He just played naturally.

Bob Burns was born in Van Buren, Arkansas, August 2, 1896, and not only finished high school but also attended the University of Arkansas where he studied engineering. When he was only six years old, Bob learned to play the mandolin, and later the piano.

One evening when he was sixteen he was practicing with a local band in a plumbing shop. To amuse himself he picked up a

couple of pieces of pipe, stuck a big whiskey funnel in the end, and blew heartily—the bazooka was born.

It was the call of a minstrel show which lured Bob from college. Thereafter, although lean days would occasionally force him into other jobs, he was always ready to jump back to show business.

After serving with the AEF in 1918, Bob came back to the vaudeville engagements which eventually landed him in pictures. It wasn't until an appearance on the Rudy Vallee program, however, that Bob began to hit his stride. From featured radio roles with Bing Crosby and Paul Whiteman he went on to star in pictures and on his own NBC show, which he continued until 1947.

Since then he has been enjoying life on his ranch, with his family, his fine horses, and—of all things—his fancy and rare birds. He makes only an occasional radio or TV appearance, but when he does the Burns ham is still there!

Jack Haley started as an apprentice electrician in a Navy yard of his home town, Boston, but soon realized that he had to try his luck as an actor in New York. Although he met early rebuffs, Jack was soon making a Hoboken debut in vaudeville. Six months after his first appearance, he was ready for the big time.

It wasn't long before the Haley act was booked for vaudeville's pot of gold, New York's Palace Theatre. A successful appearance there gave him a chance to try the legitimate theater. Leads in such shows as "Good News," "Follow Through" (written especially for him), and "Take a Chance" gave the name of Jack Haley a permanent place on Broadway.

An earlier discovery by the motion pictures, plus one at this high point in his career, flopped dismally and gave Haley two down and one to go. After returning to Broadway to co-star with George Jessel in "Show Time," Jack Haley made a third trip to Hollywood to join the "Village Store" cast. This time he was there to stay: A number of successful pictures have confirmed Haley's place on the screen as well as in radio—and television, where he is currently one of the new medium's "big guns."

When Jack Carson was a nineteen-year-old student at Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota, he met a fellow named Dave Willock who said, "Say, we'd make a funny team. Let's go on the stage."

It was, as Carson tells it, as simple as that.

In the 1920's vaudeville was still big. A pair of clever kids who could dance, sing, and make up quaint sayings could find work.

"Mostly, we told jokes," Carson says. "Corny, you know."

They went from small time to big time, played New York, played the Paramount, until they split their act to go their separate ways. The Middle West remembers Jack Carson favorably as an affable master of ceremonies at many of the small and large theaters that used to play vaudeville.

Carson credits his first screen opportunity to Bobbie Webb, of United Artists, who gave him a bit part in a picture whose name he has forgotten—fortunately forgotten, he explains. However, such films as "Two Guys from Texas," "Thank Your Lucky Stars," "Arsenic and Old Lace," and "The Time, the Place, and the Girl" have given him a firm niche in Hollywood, where he is now under long-term contract to Warner Brothers.

Carson's humor goes something like this:

Citing the popularity of his CBS comedy show, Jack exclaimed to Nephew Tugwell: "Why, last week I sneezed on the air, and already I've got four thousand postcards with 'Gesundheit!' written on them!"

Jack was boasting about his popularity in Des Moines. Harry Blake commented: "I was back there last year . . . and you know something? As a sort of tribute to you, they haven't changed a thing in your dressing room."

"Gee, that's quite an honor," Carson said. "You mean my dressing room is still the same as the night I left?"

"Yep,—tar and feathers all over the place!"

Eddie Bracken is one of the few vaudevillians who'll admit that he was not born backstage in a trunk. But he insists that he has wanted to be an actor for most of his thirty-one years.

Eddie—like Ed Gardner—was born February 7, 1920, in Astoria, Long Island. At nine, his talents as an entertainer won him an engagement with the New York Kiddie Troupers, a sort of cross between Our Gang and the Meglin Kiddies. Soon thereafter he came west to join the Our Gang moppets.

At thirteen he got his first Broadway stage role, as understudy to Junior Durkin in "The Lottery." He progressed from that to a bit in "The Man on Stilts." Bigger and better bits followed.

But what's a bit to a guy with a yen for pictures? So Eddie left home at sixteen with his parents' best wishes and \$4.20 in his pocket. He was hungry, miserable, and homesick before he crossed the Alleghenies, but with determination and an upraised thumb, he pushed on westward. When he reached Hollywood he slept under a tree and for nearly three months thereafter batted his head against unresponsive studio gates.

When his family wired him to come home and sent him the funds for the return trip, Eddie wasted no time. The day he arrived in Manhattan, his luck turned; he landed a small part in "The Lady Refuses." Ironically, this led to a Hollywood offer on a picture about Huckleberry Finn, which, sadly, didn't jell and left Eddie right on Broadway.

Just when complete frustration was setting in, he landed the top comedian role in George Abbott's "Too Many Girls." Another hit, in "Iron Men," followed. He played so well that Abbott summoned him for the role of commandant in "Brother Rat." Inevitably, Hollywood called—this time for keeps.

Eddie's "blueprint for success" calls for his eventual progression to producing, directing, writing, and acting in his own pictures and radio shows. Since he is still young, such an ambitious program is not at all unlikely for a man with Eddie's energy.

The United States and Canada share a variety of things as neighbors—including a sense of humor. America's share in Canada's laughter comes from Vancouver, British Columbia, in the person of Alan Young.

Young was born in North Shields, Northumberland, England,

in 1919. Four years later, his family moved to Vancouver. Alan is a descendant of the famous Scotsman, William Wallace ("Scots wha' hae wi' Wallace bled," etc.).

He made his first radio appearance while still in Vancouver High School, doing dialect comedy, a type of entertainment at which he is a master today. Two years later he took a job at a radio station, where he did everything from writing and acting to announcing, assisting the news editor, and doubling as stenographer.

Frank Cooper, New York producer-director, was listening to his radio one day when it went "off the beam." He tuned in short wave, quite by accident to the Toronto station where Alan was performing. Cooper liked him, and when Alan arrived in New York, sponsors were interested and the "Alan Young Show" got under way quickly.

Look magazine said: "Probably no star of the American air has risen faster than Alan Young, Canadian comedian, who is making his mark after only seven months in American radio." Alan's particular comic quality was further described as "a cross between Harold Lloyd's and Kenny Baker's."

Late in 1940, Alan was doing "a voice off-stage" in one of the night clubs and his mother, sitting in the audience, began bragging to a girl next to her about her son who was doing the unseen talking. The girl liked the voice and asked to see the body which went with it, and that's how Alan met Mary Anne Grimes from Seattle, whom he later married.

Giving vent to his great ambition to write, Alan helps his own writers on his TV show scripts, using long "after-show" acts to try out new jokes.

Keenan Wynn is living proof that the movies are no longer in their infancy. Young Wynn is a third-generation actor, his father being Ed Wynn, and his grandfather Frank Keenan, who for years was one of the most famous silent stars on the MGM lot.

Born in the shadow of Broadway, in 1916, Keenan has appeared in ninety-six stage productions, including seventy-five in stock. Steeped in theatrical lore, he nevertheless decided to become an aviator. He agreed to study dancing with Ned Wayburn in New

York, hopeful that his father would see how clumsy he was on the ground and consent to a flying career. It didn't work; Keenan has never left the profession in which he was born. He did, however, eventually become an aviator, and cracked up three times—escaping with only broken ankles.

A graduate of St. John's Military Academy, he skipped college to go on the stage. Among the shows in which he has appeared are "Remember the Day," "Hey Diddle Diddle," "Ceiling Zero," and "Jason."

Intensely witty, Francis Xavier Aloysius James Jeremiah Keenan Wynn has been a busy man in Hollywood. Remember his marvelous scenes in "Without Love"?—to say nothing of his roles in such films as "Easy to Wed," "The Cockeyed Miracle," "The Hucksters," and "Three Little Words."

Wynn Wit:

A parody on the song from "Two Sisters From Boston" goes, "G'wan home, your mudder's callin', your fadder jest fell in de garbage can," etc. Keenan's version, which he calls "Cow Cow Boogie," goes "G'wan home, your udder's callin', your fodder jest fell in de garbage can" . . . What these comedians will do for a laugh!

He tells the story about the man who went into a bar, calling for a hangover cure. While he was gulping his pick-me-up, a big St. Bernard dog came into the bistro, stood up with his forepaws on the bar and demanded loudly, "Give me a dry Martini—with two olives. Two olives, mind you!"

The bartender mixed the drink and dropped in the two olives as the bewildered gent with the hangover hung onto the bar with shaking hands. The dog downed his martini, ate both olives, paid his bill, and departed.

"Say," groaned the drunk weakly, "Isn't that a bit—well, sort of unusual?"

"Nope, nothing unusual about it," answered the bartender. "I have a lot of customers who like two olives in a Martini."

Ray Bolger, of the unbelievable, fantastic dancing, the striking

poses, and the impossible defiances of gravity, belongs first, last, and always to Broadway. He's made many pictures, but the camera can't quite get the sheer preposterousness of Bolger's face, figure, and feet.

The stage play "Where's Charley?" was a natural for him. Ray Bolger is one of those actor-creators who can take a show mellow with age and make its age contribute to its mirth. No two performances are ever alike. Ray invents or devises something new for each one. And each is a little better than its predecessor. "Where's Charley?"—a revision of a play called "Charley's Aunt"—has been around since 1892. Never has it been better than it is today.

In it Ray dresses most of the time as a little, predatory, gray-haired lady. He is the first actor who has ever played both the part of Charley and the aunt. This means thirteen quick changes during an evening. But for the agile, graceful Ray, that's just another routine.

Ray sprang from Dorchester, Massachusetts, in 1904. He never wanted to be anything more than a bank president, and the fact that "Where's Charley?" brings him \$3,500 a week is a source of constant amazement to the once-shy hoofer.

You see, Ray was always shy at school proms. He couldn't dance. This didn't matter too much to a guy who wanted to work in a bank, until he began realizing how pretty girls were. It came to him quite suddenly: he loved them all and they loved those who danced. It was sad, but the indefatigable Ray found a remedy. He went to a dancing teacher. It didn't do much good and as far as Ray was concerned the senior prom was a complete flop.

He took part of the eight dollars a week he made as an errand boy at the bank after graduation and went to the St. James Ballroom for lessons. That was misery and he didn't learn much. But he met Salvatore Chicorelli, a brother wallflower, who told him about Dinny Haley, a night watchman at the Horticultural Hall, who had once been a vaudeville hoofer.

Haley liked Bolger, and soon the errand boy was time-stepping it about the marble-vaulted halls of the bank. He was fired. Dancing had claimed him.

After that it was vaudeville. In 1926 he did a dancing routine in "The Passing Show." The late John Anderson wrote in his column the next day: "A very large pair of pants came out on the stage and did some of the most fantastic gyrations I've ever seen and then disappeared completely from view, and I still don't know who he is."

During those days a sixteen-year-old girl, Gwen Rickard, who wanted to be a song writer, came backstage. She became Mrs. Bolger instead.

Filmwise he is best remembered for his endearing version of the scarecrow in "The Wizard of Oz," and his playing of Jack Donahue in "The Great Ziegfeld." But he's definitely at his best with an audience. He loves every chuckle and groan and cough and handclap he hears. He plays up to an audience. He has them loving him within minutes.

Bolger describes himself as looking "like everybody's second cousin," but I personally don't have any second cousins with the vitality and personality of Ray Bolger—do you?

S.Z. (for nothing) Sakall is a round, glowing little man with such an astounding brace of chins that when he gets excited, which is practically all the time, they jump and squirm like a lively little cascade all the way down to his chest. Nobody can see his curious antics without laughing, which is probably one of the reasons why, in the books of every casting director in Hollywood, Sakall's name is high on the list of character comedians.

Sakall was born in Budapest, Hungary, on February 2, 1890, the son of Heinrich Sakall, a well-to-do sculptor. He started in the theater as a playwright. In Hungary, at the time, he says, playwriting got neither respect nor money. But actors in his plays were well paid, and Sakall ultimately found himself nursing a burning desire to become an actor.

Finally Sakall got his chance. It was at a charity performance in Budapest. The performance, incidentally, was of one of Sakall's plays, "Girl Gymnasium," a satire on the then-new idea of a specialized girls' school.

"I am a heet. Like the Cinderlilly story I get a note in my

dressing room. A movie producer from Berlin who has seen the show wishes to see me. I am so happy I am a cleek."

The next week he was in Berlin. When a Hungarian producer, Bela von Bolvary, came to Berlin to produce his story, "Two Hearts in Three-Quarter Time," he met Sakall and on the spot cast him in the film. Sakall, the actor, had arrived!

In the next ten years he made 105 pictures and became one of the biggest box-office draws in Europe.

"But," he says, "I was not happy. I vorked too hard."

Until 1939 he made pictures and played on the stage in European centers. In May of that year he finally braved his fear of the sea and came to Hollywood where he has been featured in film after film, making millions laugh.

Leon Errol is most famous for personifying the universal emotion, complete and frustrated anger. Ever seen his "slow burn"? That's what Errol does with anger when it's too overwhelming for him. He doesn't let it come on all at once. There's a trick to it. You spread your fingers open across your face, slowly closing them, one at a time, and letting your nose come in the path of each finger as you close it. When this is complete, the face has the countenance of a blown-up squid. He's bald-headed and one of the best remembered slapsticks in the comedy world.

Joe E. Brown of the large mouth and pop eyes recently made a nationwide tour as Elwood P. Dowd in the Pulitzer Prize play, "Harvey." Born in Holgate, Ohio, July 28, 1892, Joe E. joined the circus when he was nine, and then decided he was really slated for big-time baseball.

Having completely struck out in that league, he hit a home run in vaudeville, starring in "Jim Jam Jems," "Listen Lester," and "Greenwich Village Follies." His screen debut was in 1928 in "Elmer the Great," and he was voted the top money-making star in the *Herald* Fame Poll of 1932—a year when making money was no easy proposition. Such pictures as "Elmer the Great," "The Circus Kid," "On with the Show," "Hold Everything," "Don't Be

Jealous," and "The Tenderfoot" made him a favorite in rural and urban areas and a great screen attraction for children as well as adults.

Joe E., a fine pantomimist, was a presound movie star too. Remember "Shut My Big Mouth?" And who can forget his efforts in entertaining servicemen in the Pacific Theater during the war?

One of the most lovable characters in the comedy field is Billy Gilbert. Big, fat, black-haired Gilbert came up through vaudeville, too. He's fondly remembered for his role in "The Great Dictator," though his screen debut was in 1929's "Noisy Neighbors." Billy eventually got wound up in screen production; currently he keeps in touch with movies and an audience by doing occasional bit parts and shorts, where he is still able to make 'em laugh.

"Topper" Roland Young is an import. Origin: the London stage. Comfortably middle-aged, comical, and with an eye for the ladies, Roland is the suave, sophisticated character. A star in the silent days, he later starred in "And Then There Were None," Agatha Christie's mystery masterpiece.

He, like Edward Everett Horton, worked in comic opera. Horton did some Gilbert and Sullivan pieces on Staten Island in his salad days; was on the stage for thirteen years, where he appeared in such memorables as "Smilin' Through." Horton's screen debut in 1918 established him as a stellar film actor. Since then his bright and unique personality has continuously brightened the celluloid product.

Jack Oakie, known originally as Lewis D. Offield in Sedalia, Missouri, where he was born November 12, 1903, appeared in his first show in 1919. It was a charity affair, and his partner was Lulu McConnell, with whom he later starred in "Ziegfeld Follies." They remained partners until 1927.

The following year Jack played with Laura LaPlante in his first film, "Finders Keepers." From there he went on to "The Fleet's In," with "It" girl Clara Bow. Since then he's done starring and

supporting roles by the dozen, in such films as "Hard To Get," "Chinatown Nights," "The Man I Love," and "If I Had a Million," one of Jack's funniest.

Oakie's boisterous, sympathetic, easygoing manner reminds one of the more comic moments of the boy next door or third cousin twice removed, Elsworth. Though Jack has never returned to Broadway, one of these days a smart producer will realize that Mr. Oakie has been gone too long.

When the vogue for newsreels started dropping, companies tried old-time anecdote humor. If they were shooting the Diaper Derby, a take couldn't be complete unless the diaper was half off the baby. Into this set came Lew Lehr of Fox Movietone with his unforgettable expression, "Monkeys are the cwaziest people." Lew was architect, real estate broker, and vaudeville-music-comedy talent before he broached the monkey's side of the news. No novice at this moving art, he had been with the old Edison dramas ("Tin-types," "Magic Carpet," and "Lew Lehr's Unnatural History"). In 1932 he started editing the Fox Movietone shorts, including a group called "The Dribblepuss Series." Until his premature death, Fox found him practically indispensable to the news. During years when most news was tragic, Lew could still make people laugh at certain aspects of it—and who can say that is bad? Had he lived, his giggle, his unique voice, and his facial contortions would surely have made him a TV topnotcher.

Few writers have gone from the literary field into acting out their comedy, but the guy who did it with the greatest dexterity was the late Robert Benchley. Benchley turned movie actor when a studio was casting for someone to play the part of the hero in one of Benchley's best pieces. At a story conference when the "type" was being discussed, the director decided wisely that the best guy for the part was the guy who knew all about it—the author! He had always been a natural wit, and did very little in the literary field when he was young.

Legions of readers and movie fans appreciated such Benchley wit as:

"Would I be violating any confidence if I began my lecture affirming that man is dog's best friend?

"Or must I prove it?

"Take the Waldorf-Astoria's Peacock Alley any morning at 2 A.M. Well, at least take those boxed trees that line its gilded length. There I have met some of my best friends—both two-legged and four-legged.

"It is the time when dog meets dog and man gets tangled in the leash. Also the time to find out who wears the culottes in the family. Remember, the wives are all peacefully asleep upstairs, while the husbands are walking the dogs.

"That, naturally, brings up the portion of our essay concerned with the training of the canine species.

"First, you housebreak them. Unless you live in a hotel like the Waldorf-Astoria. Then you hotelbreak them. Or if you live in a trailer, as so many of us do in these days of housing shortages, try and park it near a fire plug.

"Now that we have overcome the first problem on our agenda—boy, I've wanted to use that ten-dollar word—let us take up number two.

"Primarily, you must win the dog's confidence. This is quite difficult, especially if the dog has no confidence."

And, so on . . . to the delight of sophisticates and nonsophisticates everywhere. The inimitable Benchley.

Movie comediennes, gals like the lovely Carole Lombard, had more custard pies thrown at them during their careers than a dozen bakers could produce. This rough-and-tumble approach to comedy was at its height in the old Keystone Comedies. Keystone Cops and the lovely ladies of the bathing ensemble gave our granddaddies plenty of thrills. Universally adored was Mack Sennett's Mabel Normand. Even sweet Gloria Swanson used to clown it up now and then.

But as motion pictures progressed, so did comedy. Comediennes became specialists. Zazu Pitts hit the Hollywood scene with her quivering voice, wide, sad eyes, and jittery hands. She became so well typed that it was difficult to cast her because almost every-

one in the country could do a Zazu Pitts routine as well as Zazu herself. Others became typed but, fortunately, not so definitely.

There is one little blond singer who has really given music a shot of laughter.

Betty Hutton was born in Battle Creek, Michigan, on February 26, 1921. By the time she was fourteen, Betty was a singing veteran of three years, helping to support her mother and sister Marion. The blond moppet would sing on street corners and in cafés and then take up a collection. Some Saturdays she would clear a good ten dollars.

Betty had early confided to her mother that she dreamed of singing in big musical shows. The summer she was fourteen she set off with an orchestra of young musicians who were going out to crack New York. But Broadway was harder to crack than they had anticipated. Betty told all the booking agents she was twenty-one. They didn't say they didn't believe her—they just didn't give her a job. Finally, she went home.

One night Betty was given a chance to sing with an orchestra at a Lansing hotel. The leader had seen her grow up. It might help some if she could sing with his orchestra. The first night she sang, Vincent Lopez was eating in the dining room. He heard her, was impressed, and decided to gamble. That was La Hutton's first big job.

But things didn't soar right to great heights. In fact, Betty didn't register as well as Lopez had expected. He didn't say much, he just kept giving her another week's chance, until finally he knew he'd have to send his little singer home.

One of the musicians knew what was happening and decided it would be best to give Betty a hint. Mustering up courage he told her the sad story.

That did it. A different Betty Hutton strode onto the stage that fatal night. She was "burned up." She felt like tearing things to pieces. And she did. She stamped, shouted, batted the microphone around, waved her arms, and threw vicious punches at the air. And it was quite a trick, but all the while she still sang.

Her voice hit every corner of the theater and every sense of

humor the audience offered. When the number ended, it was the audience who tore up things. They nearly took the theater apart. That was the beginning of the Betty Hutton we know now.

A year later, she moved to the Casa Mañana in New York to work for Billy Rose. She was slated to open the show, to warm up the folks for the other acts. Everyone was busy eating. She had to get their attention. She cut loose and sang as she had never sung before.

The bolder she got, the more she slammed the microphone around. As she neared her song's end, inspiration came. She rushed for the wings, grabbed the curtain, and, using it as a rope, swung right off the stage, singing as she went!

After the show, Billy Rose called all his entertainers together to talk over changes which the performance had shown to be necessary. To Betty he said: "Don't change anything, young lady. There's only one thing I ask; please don't tear down my nice new place."

The next day, there was a new star on Broadway.

During her Broadway run of "Panama Hattie," Betty was offered a spot for a comedienne in "The Fleet's In." The rest is just so much more history for Betty. Her singing of "Arthur Murray Taught Me Dancing in a Hurry" was a Hollywood landmark. Since then "Bounding Betty," also called "The Blonde Blitz," "The Merry Madcap," "Incendiary Blonde," "Platinum Screwball," and "Hectic Hutton" (among other names), has become a major star in the film world, a sure box-office attraction.

Marjorie Main gives us a more sustained and serious type of humorous characterization. Billie Burke is one you can feel sorry for. Ann Sothern has a way with men. Lucille Ball can put the charm on. Eve Arden can play almost any comedy role. Vera Vague seldom keeps her wits about her. Virginia O'Brien uses the dead-pan, straight-faced technique. Academy Award winner Hattie McDaniels just makes us chuckle with her sincere, downright, earthy type of comedy.

Hollywood is a place of curio collectors. They gather everything from ship models to Aztec coins. Marjorie Main differs from

the ordinary collector in that she specializes in the wonderful treasures of human nature.

All her screen roles, from that of the mother in "Dead End" to the comical portrayal of "Tiny" Tucker in "Jackass Mail," were filched from real life. Marjorie's interest in people has led her into many experiences; has made a star of her; and has given her insight into humanity.

The daughter of an Elkhart, Indiana, minister who objected to her stage ambitions, she won Dad over when she married Dr. Stanley LeFevre Krebs, a noted clergyman, lecturer, and author, who encouraged her career and convinced her father.

As a schoolgirl, Mary Tomlinson was invariably an active participant in amateur dramatics and church socials. Against the wishes of her parents, she joined a Shakespearean company playing the Chautauqua circuit. There began a romance with Dr. Krebs. They were married and spent their honeymoon in Salt Lake City. When the bride went on the Orpheum Theatre circuit, Dr. Krebs booked his lectures with her play dates. It was he who, inspired by Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*, which they had been reading together, proposed she call herself Marjorie Main.

After playing stock in Fargo, North Dakota, for twenty-three weeks, Marjorie returned to Broadway to team with W. C. Fields in "The Family Ford." Within three years she succeeded Adrienne Morris in the starring role in "Yes or No." Her ability was fully recognized in a series of hits, including "House Divided," "The Wicked Age," "Salvation," and a tour with Hal Skelly and Barbara Stanwyck in the stage hit, "Burlesque."

At this triumphant stage of her life, she stepped out in order to be with her husband, whose work took him away from New York. She counts their fourteen years together as the happiest of her life. Dr. Krebs died in 1934. Marjorie returned to the stage, hoping to find solace in work. Since her memorable role in "Dead End," she has been steadily in demand. Appearing in over forty pictures, Marjorie Main's dry wit, the frosty smile, the filelike rasp of her voice, and the sparkle in her eyes have become film stand-bys.

Playing flighty females of uncertain age is a chore extremely distasteful to some character actresses, but Billie Burke, the best-

known exponent of the type, loves it and does not yearn to do anything else. For Billie is almost as popular today as three or four decades ago, when as an exquisitely pretty redhead she was the darling of the American stage. Though the women she portrays are somewhat on the featherbrained side, Miss Burke is not one whit disturbed—so long as they are warmhearted and likable.

Billie, born August 7, 1885, in Washington, D.C., was christened Ethelbert, but in early childhood acquired her father's nickname and kept it. Her father, William E. Burke, was a famous clown with the Barnum and Bailey circus. Most of her schooling was acquired in France and England, and it was in the latter country that she first went on the stage, trying her hand at pantomime and singing in variety.

She made her formal debut as an actress in the musical comedy, "The School Girl," on May 9, 1903, at the Prince of Wales Theater in London. During her four years in London she attained outstanding success, succeeding the popular Phyllis Dare as the star of "The Belle of Mayfair."

Her American stage debut, in 1907, was in "My Wife," starring John Drew, at the old Empire Theater in New York. In 1916, at the height of her stage popularity, Billie tried film acting, starring in a series of silent pictures of which the first was "Gloria's Romance." That was shortly after she married the late Florenz Ziegfeld. After the birth of their daughter, Patricia, Miss Burke abandoned her professional career for almost fifteen years, returning to motion pictures with the advent of sound.

Since then Billie's pictures and Broadway appearances have been many and her delightfully daffy gift of gab established her as a popular radio personality.

With the 1949 publication of her autobiography, *With a Feather on My Nose*, the irrepressible Miss Burke joined the author ranks, as amusing with the written word as she has been for so many years with the spoken. To her fans, Billie Burke, whatever her age, will always be the ever-young, gay, rattlebrained comedienne—and they love her.

Ann Sothorn, the little blond Houdini of the screen, can get out of one career and into another faster than a magician can

change strait jackets. After wrapping herself in four separate and distinct stage and screen careers and escaping with delicate dexterity, she is now away on her fifth and most amazing one as a singing star.

She first appeared in the movies at a tender age, as an ingenue, then faded away and reappeared on the stage. In her next quick-change she came back to pictures for unsophisticated leads, then shook them off for stardom in romantic roles with character. And then, like lightning across Hollywood skies, she flashed from the fast-chatter escapades of "Maisie" into lilting and colorful musicals.

By the time Harriet (Ann Sothern) Lake was ten she had been run over by every type of wheeled vehicle except a horse-drawn buggy. She had also been burned at her grandmother's when her flimsy nightgown caught fire from a heater, but she survived to entertain the neighborhood in backyard shows notable for their extensive wardrobes and her singing and playing of her own compositions.

Years later Ann met Florenz Ziegfeld at a party and he offered her the second lead in his next show, "Smiles." After "Smiles," she played in three other Broadway successes; in the last, "Of Thee I Sing," she was the star.

Then came a wire from Hollywood. Would she play the lead in "Let's Fall in Love"?

Would she!!!

For the next decade and more, beautiful Ann wowed Hollywood and America, going from sweet roles to Honky Tonk Maisie with the heart of spun sugar. She was sailing smoothly along when, as she says simply, "I decided that I'd like to sing."

What's next? "I wouldn't know," she smiles, "I haven't thought the matter over." But you can bet that Ann can do anything in Hollywood from Shakespeare to Tarzan, with the added stipulation that she can sigh softer than Juliet or yowl louder than Weissmuller.

In her own words Lucille Ball says: "I was born on August

16, but as far as I am concerned, any woman who tells her age will tell anything. Although I was born in Butte, Montana, I call Jamestown, New York, my home town. Mother and I moved there when I was two. Dad, a mining engineer with the Anaconda Copper Mines, died then and my grandparents sent for us. Mother was only eighteen." (Lucille, incidentally, was born in 1911.)

Her triple assets as a dependable actress, a rare titian beauty, and the possession of a personality plus rocketed Lucille Ball to solid screen stardom. While her rise, once she hit Hollywood, was speedy, it had not always been so.

After a year at the John Murray Anderson Dramatic School in New York, her teacher told Lucille she was wasting her money. So she went job hunting. She found a part in Ziegfeld's "Rio Rita," in the third road show. After three weeks she was dismissed. Next came a chance to model for a wholesale house for twenty-five dollars a week. This led to an excellent position with Hattie Carnegie. Lucille stayed with the famous designer for five years and became one of the top models of the country. But an automobile accident almost ended Lucille's career and life. The doctors said she would recover, but never walk again.

After three grueling years of perseverance, grit, and unending patience, she again went back to modeling. As the "Chesterfield Girl" of magazine ads and billboards she was discovered by Hollywood and offered a showgirl role in Eddie Cantor's "Roman Scandals."

In her seven years at RKO Lucille made twenty-five pictures. Then, in 1942, she signed a long-term contract with MGM, making her bow for them in her first technicolor opus, "DuBarry Was a Lady," and following this with a string of profitable—and amusing—films.

Now she's the star of the popular CBS show, "My Favorite Husband."

The Hollywood directors have played an important part in the evolution of American comedy.

In order to direct the comedians they have had to have a

sincere and keen sense of humor themselves. This sense of humor is manifested by their innate sense of timing and understanding of comic motivation.

Roy Del Ruth, pioneer director of motion pictures, has since 1915 made every kind of film—tear jerkers, domestic dramas, comedies, musicals, and mysteries. But Del Ruth himself prefers comedies.

The Del Ruth comedy tradition goes back to Mack Sennett days, when he directed ten comedies a year for that producer, including all the Ben Turpin pictures. Before then he had had fair success selling cartoons and stories to New York newspapers, but he decided to go to California to see how pictures were made. In addition to having the distinction of directing the first all-talking picture, "The Terror," Del Ruth directed such early films as "Ham and Eggs at the Front," "Beware of Bachelors," and "Beauty and the Boss," and such recent films as "It Happened on Fifth Avenue," "Always Leave Them Laughing," and "West Point Story."

In the old days Del Ruth used to make up his comedy sequences on the back of a restaurant menu. Then he and his cameramen would start out on location with Ben Turpin, Charlie Murray, and Marie Prevost and shoot until they ran out of film. The spontaneity his pictures have shown ever since is due to that early training, when ideas had to take the place of a big budget.

It wasn't many years ago that S. Sylvan Simon was enrolled at the University of Michigan.

"I needed just one course to become an instructor in dramatics," he recalls. "It was called 'The Art of Direction,' but the professor advised me against taking it. He said I couldn't possibly pass, and he was about right. By great perseverance I managed to get a D, which meant 'barely passing.'"

When he discovered that he couldn't direct plays while at Michigan until he became a senior, though he had directed school plays while in a Pittsburgh high school, Simon organized the Hillel Players and directed plays in his spare time off the campus.

In New York, while studying law at Columbia, he kept looking for an opportunity in the theater, and found it when he became

director of "Girls in Uniform." He also directed "Lysistrata" and "Ode to a Grecian Urn."

Simon's first motion picture was a farce called "A Girl With Ideas," with Walter Pidgeon and Wendy Barrie.

He came to the attention of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in an odd way. Mervyn LeRoy, who has discovered such actresses as Lana Turner, Loretta Young, and Patricia Dane, looked at the screen test of some young players.

"You can keep the players," he said, "But I would like to talk with the man who directed this test."

LeRoy's recommendation brought S. Sylvan Simon a contract, and his first picture for MGM was "Spring Madness." Ruth Hussey was in it, and that was pretty funny too. "She was one of my classmates at the University of Michigan," Simon says. "She knew all about my Hillel Players and how I had all but flunked the course in The Art of Direction. That was one time when a director was at the mercy of his leading lady."

Several other Simon pictures followed, and then came "Whistling In The Dark," with Red Skelton. Since then Simon has been a leading director of screen comedy.

He divides comedy into three classifications, each illustrated by one of his pictures. Character comedy he illustrates by Wallace Beery in "The Bugle Sounds." Abbott and Costello supplied the slapstick variety in Simon's picture, "Rio Rita," and he has directed comedy of situation in "Grand Central Murder."

"No matter how you classify comedy," Simon says, "it is concerned with personalities and built entirely around them. Just as the punishment fits the crime, the situation must suit the comedian."

Eddie Buzzell, who has been associated with comedy since the days of Gus Edwards' "Kid Revues," thinks audiences laugh at what is familiar to them.

Another fundamental of comedy on which he stakes his reputation is that there is no such thing as a new joke. "Comedy is ageless," he says. "Take Red Skelton and Bert Lahr—each represents a different era of comedy. Yet they are fundamentally the same. It is their style which is individualistic.

"Another common bond shared by comedians the world over is worry. There is nothing funny about directing a funny picture. Bolstering up the courage of a comedian is a major problem. Every comedian, including myself, is a champion worrier.

"Take your Fred Allens, Jack Bennys, Ed Wynns, Groucho Marxes. They've been rubbing the nation's funny bone for a good many years. They still are. They're also worry warts. That greatest ad-lib artist of them all, Will Rogers, did the most worrying over his material. Those quick, snappy retorts came after hours of thought. He knew what he was going to say, but the audience didn't know he knew it. Therein lies the secret of a comedian's success."

Eddie should know, for he has worked with the best talent money could buy in our time. His more recent films in his long career—"Easy to Wed," "Song of the Thin Man," "That Bedside Manner," to name only a few—are ample evidence of the success of his theories on comedy.

Director Charles Riesner, one of Hollywood's original gag men, spent thirty years with cup-custard comedy, during which time he handled every important star from Charlie Chaplin to the Marx Brothers. Always careful to make the most of the individual comedian's personality, Riesner is also an extremely skillful and ingenious user of situation and prop.

"For the director there is little difference between straight drama and comedy," jet-jowled Riesner explains. "Direction is recognizing dramatic values and pointing them to the story. Comedy is usually nothing more than an exaggeration of this straight technique."

In Riesner's opinion a good director must have an easy familiarity with experience. His own background underscores this belief. This wide-shouldered director knows life. He's from the rough-and-tumble school.

While still a lad in Minneapolis, "Chuck" ran up a sensational string of victories as an amateur boxer. He continued as a pro and pummeled his way to a middleweight championship match with the great Billy Papke. A few days before the bout, Riesner was offered

a lucrative vaudeville engagement. He chose the latter and thus launched a career in the entertainment world that has few parallels.

Riesner hit Hollywood after a decade of "songs and genteel patter" from the stages of drafty three-a-day houses all over the country. He was a writer first; later he took a whirl at directing and acting.

His big break came when he signed with Charlie Chaplin as coauthor and director of such solid comedy smashes as "Shoulder Arms," "The Kid," "The Gold Rush," and others. Within a few years he was guiding such guffaw garnerers as Marie Dressler, Jack Benny, Laurel and Hardy, Buster Keaton, Polly Moran, Charlotte Greenwood, and the merry-mad Marx Brothers. He has directed more than two hundred pictures, in England, Scotland, Ireland, and Australia, as well as in Hollywood, U.S.A.

As you near the end of this chapter, you probably have got the idea that there are very few young movie comedians. The picture is exactly that. One of the few who has made the grade is Donald O'Connor, who comes from a family long steeped in vaudeville and its tradition. This "Junior" (only twenty-five) has more than ten major pictures to his very young credit, and if he behaves himself—not easy in Hollywood—there is no limit to his possible future.

Another newcomer to movies is radio and stage's Paul Douglas, though he is by no means a young man. If you saw Paul in "Letter to Three Wives," you know what a mild sensation he created for himself with comedy lovers. Paul graduated to the role from his part in Broadway's long, long, long run "Born Yesterday," where he was the uncouth, rugged individualist who made a fortune in scrap iron, bought and sold senators and congressional power, and kept a dizzy blonde. Paul scored a victory as the small-time man gone big time and was sensationally funny in his reaction to contact with the intelligentsia. A one-time radio announcer, Paul hounded directors and producers for acting parts until they had to give in. Today, they're glad they did.



6



TEAM — YEAH — TEAM

Here are the boys who combine forces to make you laugh—the straight-men and the funnymen, or the slapsticks who throw things at each other. Whoever they are, they belong together—one without his partner is like eggs without ham. Back in the old days they set vaudeville audiences on the edges of the seats. Today they're part of radio, television, night-club, and theater entertainment.

Let's begin with one of the most successful of them all.

A saga of radio was born a quarter of a century ago. On January 7, 1926, two unknown actors sat in the office of the *Chicago Tribune's* radio manager and conceived the two blackface characters who were the immediate forerunners of the inimitable "Amos 'n' Andy."

That evening, the pair went to the apartment they shared, sat in front of a typewriter, and struggled to get their program idea into shape. They worked for hours and they tore up everything they wrote. Then, as the winter sun came up faintly, one of them said wearily: "You know, before we can write a line of this stuff we've got to get two voices that contrast; and if we ever hit on the right two, it'll help us write for the characters we have in mind."

“Right,” agreed his partner. “A high voice and a low voice—because on this radio thing, we have to paint a picture with our voices.”

With this in mind, they worked for the voices. One dropped his lower, the other raised his and put a rasp in it. And they had it—the voices of “Sam ’n’ Henry,” which names they used for two years before changing them to “Amos ’n’ Andy.”

On January 12, 1926, “Sam ’n’ Henry” went on the air over WGN in Chicago, with this opening phrase: “Henry, did you ever see a mule as slow as dis one?” The next few speeches established the characteristics that were to make their program a national favorite.

But the start in radio of the celebrated team was not so easy as all that. They had made their first broadcast on an experimental station in New Orleans in 1920, singing “Whispering.” Then they forgot all about the burgeoning industry until 1925.

In that year they moved into radio again. Eight months of hard work—producing amateur shows and then singing from ten to fifteen songs a night on the Edgewater Beach Hotel’s WEBH—followed before anyone apparently took professional notice of them.

One day, Harry Sellinger, manager of the powerful *Chicago Tribune* station, sent for the pair. “I don’t want to waste your time or mine,” Sellinger said, “so I’ll come right to the point. We’ve heard you on WEBH and we think you’d be an asset to us. Would you consider an offer?”

The two radio singers looked at each other sheepishly.

“I can offer you a hundred and twenty-five dollars a week,” Sellinger said.

“A hun—a—uh—I mean—a hun—” Amos stammered. “You mean—each?”

“Each.”

They were hired. But they earned every cent they made on the 5,000-watter, going to work at ten in the morning and staying on until they signed the station off at two the next day. They sang songs—scores of them—told jokes, announced, played the piano.

Their big break came, however, when the general manager Ben McCanna summoned them. “I’ve been listening to you two

for the last three months," he told them, "and boys, I think you're great. However, I have an idea that you can do even better. How would you like to dramatize one of the *Tribune* comic strips?"

McCanna suggested *The Gumps* as an example, saying he could get them a couple of other actors to help.

The upcoming young radio factotums protested they couldn't do it, because, unmarried, they lacked the experience of family life.

Asked if they had any other dramatic ideas, Amos said: "Uh . . . yes. You see, I'm from the South and my partner has traveled all over the South. Look, how would it be if we did a nightly broadcast, say ten to fifteen minutes, of two colored characters?"

McCanna's eyes lit up.

"We know we can do a better job of that," said Andy, "than we could on this married-life stuff."

Enthusiastic, Amos added, "And it would be different from anything else on the air."

McCanna, excited about the idea, told them to go home and work out a blackface act.

"Sam 'n' Henry" was a smash success. Two years later, on March 19, 1928, after a tour, the beloved pair changed their program name to "Amos 'n' Andy," which for well over two decades now has been one of the most popular radio shows in America. Today, Amos 'n' Andy have made the grade in television, too.

Joe Weber and Lew Fields were nine years old in little old New York when they first joined talents. Putting baggy, oversized clothes on their bodies and whiskers on their faces, they created the Dutch comedy act of Weber and Fields, an act that was to make theater history. Their first engagement was at the famous Chatham Square Museum at \$6 per week for the pair.

It was early in their career that the famous phrase, "Here we are a jolly pair," was written into their act. And they were jolly. They can be credited with the first of the slapstick routines that in later years were so important to burlesque and moving picture comedy. The early routines called for Fields to kick Weber in the stomach and break a cane over his head. These were a prelude

to the veritable riots in which later exponents of the slapstick technique engaged.

Shortly before the turn of the century, the Weber and Fields Music Hall opened on 29th Street in New York, featuring, of course, the two mutilators of the King's English. Fields had now become a long, lanky character still using prop whiskers; Weber was the squatty, rotund, still cushion-stuffed subject of much buffoonery. They were burlesque.

They played the medicine shows, the saloons, the museums, and the concert halls. They went on to produce stage shows and minstrels, and only a few years ago we saw them popping up in pictures. "Blossoms on Broadway" and "Lillian Russell" were their best—the latter quite nostalgic to old-timers and lovers of theater, for Lillian had played with them when their Music Hall first opened.

Weber and Fields, by now legendary, were the forerunners of such youngsters in the comedy field today as Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis. They tried out the formula of slapstick and proved that the American public wanted it above all else. TV has them to thank, too, for where would the new medium be—at least in its present state of development—if it weren't for slapstick.

Abbott and Costello have been partners for better or worse in vaudeville, theater, screen, and finally radio, for fifteen years.

Bud Abbott was born on October 2, 1898, under a circus tent in Asbury Park, New Jersey. His father was an advance man for the Barnum and Bailey circus and his mother was a bareback rider. Young Abbott first began to absorb the spirit and lingo of show business in Coney Island's Dreamland Park, where he spent his youth.

At sixteen, after trying sign painting and house moving, Bud was placed by his father in the box office of the Casino Burlesque Theater in Brooklyn. He had barely assumed this job when he wandered into a water-front café. When he woke up, the café was miles behind and Bud was stoking coal on a Norwegian freighter. Once back on the solid soil of Brooklyn, he scampered back to where he remained, in one burlesque theater or another, for thirteen

years. He then became the partner of his brother Harry in the opening of Abbott's Corinthian Theatre in Rochester, New York. Before long they were operating theaters in five other cities as well.

One night in a Pennsylvania town, Bud was rushed on stage to replace a comedian who had suddenly taken ill. From then on he was on stage—remaining in the business as straight-man and producer until 1936, when he joined his efforts with those of a sad-faced little clown called Lou Costello. An ideal dead-pan artist, being naturally severe in expression and mien, Bud Abbott is celebrating almost twenty years as a straight-man. Although figuring in thousands of comic situations, Bud literally has *never told a joke*—an all-time high for straight-man efficiency.

Louis Cristillo was born on March 6, 1908, in Paterson, New Jersey. His father was an Italian immigrant who became a successful life-insurance salesman. Lou took the name Costello as a gesture of gratitude to actress Helen Costello for saving his movie "extra" job when his discharge was imminent.

As a schoolboy, Lou's great love was basketball. Everything else—including school—took second place. He was New Jersey State foul-shot champion for three consecutive years and once outplayed the great Nat Holman in a professional game. When at Paterson High School, he attended only during the basketball season. It was Mrs. Whitehead, his teacher at P.S. 15, who once punished Lou by making him write "I'm a bad boy" on the blackboard a hundred times. Little did she suspect that years later, "I'm a ba-a-ad boy" would be identified by millions of radio listeners as a Costello trade-mark.

Lou first hitchhiked to Hollywood. He was going to break into the movies. He arrived with sixty-five cents. The first six months in California left an indelible impression on Lou's mind. There's a garage on Wilshire Boulevard where Lou washed ten cars in order to be permitted to sleep one night on the premises. There's a delicatessen where he worked two days to pay for sandwiches. He'll point to a dump on a side street and say, "There's where the coroner came to hold the inquest. I was dead. Starvation."

After two years as an extra, he hitch-hiked toward the east, stopping in St. Joseph, Missouri, for a burlesque job. In a few years he had made a name for himself. He was off to New York and the Minskys—and to hold a fateful rendezvous with that lean man, Bud Abbott.

It all started with their now-famous baseball sketch. Appearing as individual members of a Minsky burlesque unit at the Oriental Theater in Chicago, each secretly admired the work of the other. Bud was impressed by Lou's ability to take terrific punishment from his straight-man. Lou was sold on Abbott's rapid-fire delivery and wonderful timing. One evening the chubby comic asked Bud to read a sketch he had just written, "Who's on first?" It elicited the same hilarious approval from Abbott that it has received since from millions of radio listeners during its countless renditions. The next day, the team of Abbott and Costello was born.

Though the tradition of the husband-and-wife comedy team is not a strong one, the list of its notable participants not long, it is flourishing now. Its roots may be said to be in the persons of Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Drew. Drew, the uncle of Ethel, John, and Lionel Barrymore, and the brother of the famed actor John Drew, was born in 1864 and died in 1919. He and his wife, Lucille McVey, formed the first husband-wife team in the infant film industry.

George Burns and Gracie Allen have been professional partners since 1922, and marital partners since 1925. But it wasn't until 1942 that they began to play a married couple for the ether waves. When the change came, they carried over some of the hilarious domestic situations which enlivened their own daily lives.

San Francisco-born Gracie was the daughter of a song-and-dance man and was another of those showpeople who made a debut as soon as they could walk. Eventually she and her three older sisters became the singing and dancing Allen Sisters. Irish jigs and brogue were Gracie's specialties.

Meanwhile George Burns was getting on with his career—after his own fashion. Born and nurtured in that New York East Side which has been the proving ground of so many comedians,

George started in at the tender age of seven as a member of the Pee Wee Quartet. He received a princely \$1.25 for his first evening's work.

By 1922 he was doing a comedy song-and-dance turn with one Billy Lorraine. It was then that Gracie entered the scene. Gracie was calling on a friend who was listed on the same bill as George. They became friends, then partners, and for a while served as a "disappointment" act, one used as a last-minute replacement. Times got better and they began to catch long-term vaudeville contracts.

George loved Gracie but Gracie wasn't so sure about George. In masterful fashion, he handed her a ten-day ultimatum. It all jelled in Gracie's heart and mind and so they were married.

Their first hit act was "Lamb Chops," and its success brought them big-time bookings. They played Europe. In London, in 1930, they made their first broadcast. The following year, star-finder Eddie Cantor put Gracie on his air show as guest, and not long afterward, George Burns and Gracie Allen were launched on their own program and soon began making their periodic appearances on the screen.

Now on TV after twenty years on radio, they have dusted off their old vaudeville routines and are funnier than ever. It's still a household of crazy happenings—but now you see it!

Off the air, George says Gracie is a typical housewife who reads, cooks, and "ties up the telephone, just like other women."

Burns and Allen chatter runs like this:

Reporter: You say your husband is pretty well up on the foreign question? What's his opinion of the Far East?

Gracie: Well, he thinks New York is a nice place to visit, but no place to live in.

Gracie told George that their radio guest, Charles Boyer, had asked her to go away with him and forget all about George.

"But I won't!" she declared.

"You won't?" asked George.

"Of course not!" said Gracie. "I'll write to you every day!"

Long before handsome Phil Harris became a regular on the Jack Benny program he was a personality in the dance-hall, night-club, and theater world.

But the Benny show gave Phil his big break and the chance to put his flare for comedy to work. The orchestra leader on any comedy show is always the butt of a few jokes as the program evolves. Harris, who hails from Linton, Indiana, manufactured his present Southern accent when he used to introduce dance numbers to the radio audience while his band was playing at various hotels and night clubs. Thus, his boisterousness, vainness, and good-natured toughness have made him a valued comic character of the Benny troupe, the foil for many a gag and the perpetrator of not a few himself.

It was because of his bandleading career that he was first brought to Hollywood in 1933 to make the picture, "Melody Cruise." Jack Benny spotted him in his own picture in 1940, "Buck Benny Rides Again."

Married to Alice Faye, who started her career as a vocalist with Rudy Vallee's band, they teamed up for the first time in radio in the mid-forties to bring the radio audiences homespun scenes of an urban American family, their humor depicting the trials and tribulations of a typical family with two children—a pattern that Dagwood and Blondie, Ozzie and Harriet, and others have found extremely successful.

As an actress, Alice Faye became one of the ten best money-making stars for her Hollywood studio, Twentieth-Century Fox, but now she is confining most of her efforts to her radio show with Phil.

Olsen and Johnson were practically unknown to Broadway when they created one of the biggest stirs the Great White Way had ever known in the unprecedented "Hellzapoppin'." Once established as part and parcel of the Main Stem, they produced "Sons o' Fun." Seven hundred and forty-two performances later it set out to illuminate the marquees of hinterland playhouses.

The boys came originally from the Midwest. Ole earned his

way through Northwestern University by playing the violin. His first professional work was as a member of a quartet that played rathskellers in Chicago. That was where he met Chic Johnson, a ragtime pianist. When Chic and Ole struck out alone, they billed themselves, "Two Likable Lads Loaded with Laughs." By 1925 they had played in England and Australia. Returning to the Coast, they produced "Monkey Business," a miniature revue. Then they took over a Broadway musical, "Take a Chance," and starred in it in Chicago. Rudy Vallee placed them on his radio program, and soon radio became their field too.

By and by, they produced a unit called "Hellzapoppin'," which began out West and moved eastward. While appearing in Philadelphia, they were seen by Lee Shubert, and the following day signed a contract which resulted in a Broadway production of the show bearing the same title. It proved a sensation. The demand apparently couldn't be satisfied, a company with substitute stars went touring, and a fortune-earning film was made. The craze was set and more films followed.

Now together over thirty years as a team, they have invaded the television world and are showing video audiences their funny stuff in a new way.

Young, as radio shows go, the "Ozzie and Harriet" program has grown to be regarded as typical of the American home proceedings of Mr. and Mrs. John Smith of Main Street. But behind that there's a story.

For years Ozzie Nelson had led a band and wife Harriet had been his featured vocalist. Like the guy who used to say, "They laughed when I sat down at the piano," Ozzie can relish the memory of June, 1944, when he started to peddle his idea for a new radio program. Many listened politely to the idea—people *will* listen politely now and then—and shrugged it off. But Ozzie's idea was simple and good and he knew it. He knew that family-life comedy would be recognized by listeners if it were really natural enough.

Friends cautioned him. Discarding top billing in one field to try one's wings in another isn't a thing your friends like to see

you do. The Nelsons made their decision. They're glad and so's a great big CBS listenership.

Ozzie (Oswald George) Nelson was born in Jersey City, New Jersey, in 1906. At the age of fourteen, he was the youngest Eagle Scout in New Jersey and won a trip to Europe with his qualifying merit badges.

He attended Rutgers University, was graduated with a Bachelor degree. A big man on campus, he was varsity quarterback, letterman in lacrosse, diver on the swimming team, middleweight boxing champion, and "just missed" Phi Beta Kappa. But he didn't miss much, so when he failed to make the Glee Club it was a blow. He took up the saxophone just to show them, and soon he'd organized a band—the band that later helped pay his way through the New Jersey College of Law.

Law degree in hand, Ozzie decided that the entertainment world looked more promising than the ultimate Supreme Court bench. He took his band to major hotels and roadhouses and attained national prominence with it from the Glen Island Casino in New Rochelle, New York.

Ozzie had become proficient at vocalizing with a megaphone but decided that a female singer would give the band that touch of distinction. He chose Harriet Hilliard, a gal out of Des Moines, Iowa. She not only gave the band the touch of distinction it needed, but also provided its ambitious leader with a wife.

In the years succeeding, Ozzie and Harriet played band dates, did guest shots, and did the music and helped with the comedy on various radio shows, including Bob Ripley's, Joe Penner's, and Feg Murray's, until they joined Red Skelton's program in 1941. Skelton entered the Army in 1943 and Ozzie and Harriet came up with their "Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet."

Here is some of the real life that has captivated the "Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet" audiences. Here is family life even as yours and mine.

Complaining that Ozzie didn't pay enough attention to her appearance, Harriet challenged, "I could probably cut my hair off entirely and you wouldn't even notice it!"

"I would too," Ozzie replied.

"You would not," Harriet insisted.

"I would too," Ozzie reiterated. "Your hat wouldn't fit, it would fall over your eyes, you wouldn't be able to see, you'd trip and fall down, and when I stooped to pick you up . . . I'd be sure to notice it."

Pop Nelson balked when son David asked for an allowance raise from fifty to seventy-five cents. "Well, just think, David," Ozzie reasoned, "How would it look if you were getting a bigger allowance than me?"

Ozzie was complaining to Harriet that their son David gets more mail than he does. "That's understandable," Harriet explained patiently. "He sends off more box tops than you do."

Ozzie asked Harriet if he talked in his sleep.

"No," answered Harriet. "You've a more annoying habit—you just lie there and chuckle!"

Like Ozzie and Harriet, Blondie and Dagwood Bumstead, known in private life as Penny Singleton and Arthur Lake, are as typical of young American couples as ham and eggs.

From screen roles to private life is a change the stars must make each day. For some, the transition poses a problem. Not so for Penny and Arthur. They have found their niche in life, and in the hearts of film and radio fans. Both are happily married with families of their own, both are confirmed stars, part of a team that has become a national institution.

Born in Philadelphia, Penny is the daughter of a newspaperman. Trained from early childhood as a dancer, she became the youngest one ever featured on Broadway, going on to star in such hits as "Sweetheart Time," "Good News," "Follow Through," and "Hey, Nonny, Nonny," and working with Al Jolson, George Jessel, and Frank Morgan. Penny's film career began with "The Thin Man," but it was hardly notable until she was signed for the title role in the movie version of Chic Young's popular comic strip. At that time Penny was—as you might have guessed—a natural brunette!

Arthur Lake made his professional debut when he was two weeks old. His parents, famous in vaudeville theaters, needed a squealing baby for an important gag. Baby Arthur fitted the role perfectly. Arthur as a child played practically every little-boy role that had ever been written for repertory companies, in the same act with his actress sister, Florence Lake. He made his film debut in 1924 and quickly became a child star, a fixture in the "Sweet Sixteen" comedies. His years spent in vaudeville troupings had perfected a natural flair for comedy. In 1937, when Columbia decided to make the "Blondie" pictures, all signs pointed to Arthur as Dagwood.

Lake maintains that comedians aren't funny off the screen. "It's a business," he says. "The writers are the guys who make the screen comedian funny. If they didn't hit the humor bell, we would be as unfunny as a periscope."

"It's hard work making people laugh. That's why you seldom see a smiling comedian off the stage or screen."

On one of the Blondie radio shows, Dagwood was having a losing argument with Blondie about who would drive the family car downtown. Blondie announced that she didn't want to be driven downtown by a "possible maniac."

"But," interrupted Dagwood, "it's much safer for the driving to be done by a 'possible maniac' than by someone we KNOW is a woman."

The Blondie film and radio series has found the successful formula for comedy situations. For example, Dagwood might fall down a well. He would find that Blondie had foreseen the emergency and had a soft, waterproof mattress placed for him to land on. She saves him from fires, gangsters, and miscellaneous perils, and with a toss of her pretty, blonde curls, turns it all off as merely another trifling twist of the wrist that keeps the Bumstead marital relations in a constant state of bliss — with brief interludes of threatened tragedy that never quite gets its victims.

Incidentally, getting chummy with the Bumsteads pays off. So, if you're looking for your first "break" in pictures and want to enter the inner circle of Hollywood's top-ranking stars, then your best bet is to aim for a part in the "Blondie" series at Columbia.

These pictures have proved a good-luck charm for many a player making headlines today, including such people as Rita Hayworth, Glenn Ford, Larry Parks, Marjorie Reynolds, Janet Blair, and Adele Mara.

Originally intended as only a short series, the "Blondie" pictures now number more than thirty. Some of the best are "Leave It to Blondie," "Life with Blondie," "Blondie's Lucky Day," and "Blondie Knows Best."

Penny still plays the movie roles, but Ann Rutherford has taken over as the Blondie of the airwaves. Arthur is still the prototype of the young American family man—Dagwood Bumstead.

Sweeney and March have been partners in comedy since 1943 in San Francisco, where they had a morning "waker-upper" entitled "Sweeney's Neighbors." This was later changed to "Sweeney's Neighbor March" (because March began to feel important).

Achieving a success of sorts, the boys felt that Hollywood needed them and they set their sights. While beating their heads against Hollywood's walls, they raised the bump of an idea—they would do satires on everyday life. They wrote a few sketches, and a guest appearance on "The Ginny Simms Show" followed. From then on they hit their stride. For two years they did appearances on such Hollywood programs as "Ginny Simms," "Chesterfield Supper Club," and "Hoagy Carmichael."

Now, with their ambition realized, in a first-rate afternoon show, Sweeney and March satirize not only everyday problems but themselves as well—Sweeney playing the role of a "sweet, gullible guy," and March, of a fellow who, "while very fond of Sweeney, can't resist involving him in fast deals."

Burlesque of soap operas is nothing new, but done in the style of Steve Allen and Wendell Noble it became sparkling entertainment. But not only the big-time serials fell victim to the Smile-Time treatment; quiz shows, news broadcasts, record programs, round-table discussions, all get a going-over at the hands of Noble and Allen.

And the thing that surprised the boys most is that they were never sued by a red-necked sponsor or an irate agency!

For example, once when they tuned in to their mythical “Nit-wit Network” they featured a satire on a well-known and thinly disguised children’s show, calling it “Little Orphan Fanny,” sponsored by a product called Ovaldeen!

“When you cross the street at a busy corner against the red light,” asked a syrupy voice, “do you get that run-down feeling? When somebody slugs you, do you wake up feeling sluggish? When you lose your grocery list, or your laundry list, do you get that listless feeling? Then you ought to try Ovaldeen! Believe it or not, folks, before I drank Ovaldeen, I had circles under my eyes. After drinking it for six weeks, I’ve got ovals under my eyes!”

If you think that’s biting, you should have heard “Our Gal Tuesday,” transcribed Monday for those who missed “Our Gal Sunday”! Or “John J. Agony and the Court of Human Relations—Are Your Relations Human?”

Noble and Allen have come such a long way from the day they discovered their joint bent for clowning together at KOY, Phoenix, that they sometimes even surprise themselves.

“When we first started tossing out a fifteen-minute script of our special kind of gibberish daily, I frankly didn’t know how long we could keep up the pace,” confesses Steve. “But it got to be a regular part of our lives . . . like sleeping and eating. We’d even call up our wives and try out gags on them . . . sort of a family affair. Nice thing about both of our wives, they’re frank . . . so we knew if we could keep them laughing, we had a pretty good chance with our listeners.”

Steve has made a serious study of what makes people laugh. Evidently his serious study has been taken seriously by the TV moguls for he was recently singled out by them for “A” treatment.

Here is his version of two convicts greeting each other:

“How long are you in for?”

“Ten years. How long are you in for?”

“Twenty years.”

“Mail this, will you?”

Steve Allen is now going it alone on CBS.

Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis had come to Atlantic City to break into show business. They faced a rather sedate winter crowd and started their act. Nothing happened. So the pair tried something else. Same reaction. They had a quiet confab right on stage. Nothing happened.

Suddenly twenty-three-year-old Jerry, the guy with the bang-tailed bob, seized the end of a tablecloth. He pulled and the dishes splattered all over the floor. Atlantic City woke up.

That was but the beginning. Today Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis are the talk of the TV comedy world. They first opened in the plush niterie, Copacabana. The next day the news magazines had full-page stories about the team who grabbed sizzling platters from waiters, tripped the chorus girls, showed gratitude to patrons who laughed, and cattily discussed those who didn't.

Dean Martin is a handsome ex-croupier. Young Jerry is a precocious comic. When they come on stage anything can happen. Says Dean: "We always know how we'll get on. It's the getting off that's tough."

Sans sponsor the team earned \$750,000 in 1949. They needed television and got it. It's their medium. You've got to see their zany brand of fun—you might not believe your ears.

The fall of 1949 saw them in Hollywood; the picture, "My Friend Irma." But it is their recent film, "At War with the Army," which really heralds the birth of a film comedy team of national stature.

It was just like slipping on a piece of ice for Colonel Stoopnagle—entirely accidental. Stoopnagle, "with a face the color and shape of a beet," arose to sing to an audience of six thousand at a charity show. He forgot the words and blah-blahed through the whole thing. The audience roared. They thought he had done it on purpose.

After the Colonel met Bud Hulich in Buffalo on a local radio station, they became the "Gloom Chasers." They had ad-libbed a

program that had fallen on its face, and they thought they looked good together. As Colonel Stoopnagle and Bud, they invaded New York. For about ten years they gave li'l ole Gotham a real treat, and with their screwy inventions, novel sound effects, and hammy give-and-take, kept radio audiences roaring.

Bud, at this writing, runs a disc-jockey show with his wife in the perpetual honeymoon spot, Niagara Falls.

The Colonel worked, prior to his death, in Puerto Rico with Ed Gardner and the "Duffy's Tavern" crew.

Paul and Grace Hartman met Hank Ladd in 1941 and made a rather informal pact to join forces for a revue. Except for intermittent contacts, the exigencies of show business kept them separated until 1947, when they met in Hollywood and formulated definite plans. That summer Paul and Grace embarked on a dancing tour of the straw-hat circuit. Somewhere along the route they were joined by Mr. Ladd, and "Angel in the Wings" began to take form.

The Hartmans have been dancing together almost since the first day they met in their native San Francisco, but it was during a two-year tour of the world that they hit upon the formula resulting in their present international status as "Satirists of the Dance." Seeking to jolt their audiences into smiles, they decided to combine elemental sign language with the unspoken thought and change classic terpsichore to comedy. Ever since then they have been in high demand at the more elegant clubs and better presentation houses, and have made a dozen or so movies. On Broadway they have been seen in "Red, Hot, and Blue," "You Never Know," "The Top-Notchers," "Keep Laughing," and "Tickets, Please."

Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy managed to maintain for talkies some of the fever and punch and downright low-and-large comedy of the old Sennett days. They were successful with sound, exhausted its possibilities, and lost nothing of the expression and visualness of silent-screen funniness.

Stan Laurel, born Arthur Stanley Jefferson, June 16, 1895,

in England, started his professional life as a stage comedian. He came to America in 1910, touring this country in Fred Karno's theatrical company.

Oliver Hardy was born in Atlanta, Georgia, January 18, 1892. A great sportsman, early in his life he became a golf champion and garnered many trophies for his excellence on the course.

In 1917 Hollywood called Laurel and since that time he and Hardy have appeared in more than seventy-five pictures, including the famous series produced by Hal Roach for MGM. Almost all of their films were great successes but one in particular perhaps stands out, "The Rogue Song."

Their exquisitely slapstick, precarious-situation style was typified in a scene in which they were trying to move a piano across a narrow suspension bridge slung deadeningly over a deep chasm. Midway they met a gorilla. No holds were barred. This situation was milked. Every ounce of comedy and suspense in it was eked out for a hysterical audience.

In 1932 the team went to England for a command performance and received one of the greatest ovations any American performer has ever received in the Isles. Today their films are still popular in Europe, for like many of the old-time comedians their appeal is universal, their slapstick comedy an international language knowing no barrier of culture, system, or tongue.

As you have seen in this chapter, many teams were brought together just to perform in one medium. Bert Wheeler and Robert Woolsey, for example, were an outstanding duo in a number of film comedies, including such popular films as "Rio Rita," "Dixiana," "Half Shot at Sunrise," "Caught Plastered," "Girl Crazy," and "Full of Notions."

Bert Wheeler was born in Paterson, New Jersey, the home town of Lou Costello. He had a variety of jobs before teaming up with Robert Woolsey. These included selling newspapers, being prop boy for a Broadway hit, and finally being assistant stage manager.

Robert Woolsey was born in Oakland, California, August 14, 1889. He started his working career as a jockey and then went into

vaudeville as a single with a monologue act, continuing almost fifteen years before he teamed with Bert.

After Woolsey died several years ago, Wheeler carried on as a solo. He, too, starred for a time in the prime role of Elwood Dowd in "Harvey." Now, as are so many of the older generation of comedians, he is active in that new baby, television.

Another pair, Thelma Todd and Patsy Kelly, regaled both young and old with their comic trials and tribulations. They may have been the origin of the current "My Friend Irma" scheme. Patsy in those days was the dumb, plump half; Thelma Todd the curvaceous, popular, and sensible half. Their everyday adventures were laughing stock for a nation. Thelma's early death broke up the highly successful team and Patsy went on to do parts in movies and finally to appear with Henry Morgan on his show.

In the vaudeville ranks, a team which has stayed together for over fifty years is Smith and Dale. Few connoisseurs of comedy have failed to see their famous skit, "Dr. Kronkheit." They truly belong to show-business Americana—and with the reawakening of interest in vaudeville, they are continuing their perennially fresh (old) routines.

In the days when David Montgomery and Fred Stone were a team, their appearance on a billboard meant that the theater season had really arrived on Broadway. A versatile and well-matched pair, amiable and ambitiously comic, their grotesque costumes, versatile repertoire, and natural freshness meant packed houses wherever they went. They were comedy at its best; they were comedy in the days when you could take the whole family to a burlesque show.

Stone, the more aggressive member, was an agile, acrobatic dancer. His happiness in life inseparable from the footlights, he was always ready for another encore. Play analyst Louis V. DeFoe said of him that he raised clowning close to the arts.

Montgomery was a foil to Stone. He brought a philosophy of comedy that stood the team in good stead for almost a quarter of a century, until his death in 1917.

"If you can't amuse your audience, all of it," he said, "without the use of methods which are bound to displease a portion of it, then you are not a real comedian. There's nothing more wholesome in the theater than honest laughter, but laughter which is accompanied by a blush is not honest, and the methods employed to arouse that laughter are not honest."

When the pair appeared with Edna May in "Belle of New York" it was not only the first musical comedy Stone had ever been in, but the first he had ever seen! But it made him and partner Montgomery the most popular team in musical comedy, and it prepared the way for their notable four years in "The Wizard of Oz."

Radiowise, few teams have been so successful together or stayed so long in the minds of their fans as the wonderful Pick and Pat.

Following the pattern of comedy set by the early minstrel shows, Pick and Pat from "Chitlin' Switch, Georgia" pursued one of the most surprising comedy careers on record. For props they had baggy clothes and faces blacked with burnt cork, for material they had all the rich backlog of the traveling minstrel shows they knew so well.

Radio critic Alton Cook wrote of them, "They have violated all rules laid down by other comedians and run along paying no attention to how 'wrongly' they are conducting their highly profitable careers.

"They are the only survivors of radio's early comedy style, a style that Ed Wynn and Jack Pearl found would work no longer," Cook asserted.

Pick Malone and Pat Padgett met quite by accident when Malone was entertaining troops during the First World War. Together they perfected an act that eventually made them the only comics to have three shows concurrently on three networks under three different names. On WOR they were Pick and Pat; on NBC they were known as Molasses and January; and on WJZ they played the roles of Sooty and Boxcar. On all radio shows they used the burnt-cork make-up even though they were unseen by any audience. Pick explained that the make-up set the spirit and mood

for the act, that not using the familiar old cork seemed incongruous, and that it was just downright habit.

During World War II the pair toured the Caribbean area, entertaining hospitalized soldiers. One of the greatest tributes paid them was the compilation of a number of their old scripts, made into a handbook for convalescent soldiers so that they could stage their own minstrel shows in hospitals.

Pick and Pat, who are still very much around, may soon be a new television attraction, bringing with them the minstrel-show humor America has enjoyed for generations.

Remember the equally wonderful team of Moran and Mack? Their recording of one of their famous skits, made early in the century, is now a collector's item. It immortalizes the journey down to hell of one of the team, and his conversation with the devil on his position in that underworld.

Affectionately known as the "Two Black Crows," Charlie Mack and George Moran in their burnt-cork blackface comprised one of the most beloved comedy teams of all times. Spicing simple, unsophisticated comedy lines with a rich, drawling, southern Negro accent, the pair came from success in vaudeville to success in radio with such homey, richly funny dialogue as this:

Moran: What's an alibi?

Mack: An alibi is proving that you was where you was when you wasn't, and that you wasn't where you was when you was.

Or again:

Moran: For heaven's sake, what's wrong?

Mack: I just saw a ghost.

Moran: Did he give you a start?

Mack: Brother, I didn't need any start!

At the height of their radio career, the team was earning as much as five thousand dollars a week. It was then that the original pair split up, tragically, as it turned out. Mack, originator and owner of the team, was sued for more money by Moran, who claimed he was being paid only two hundred dollars a week.

The court ruled that as owner, Mack could legally set Moran's salary. Moran walked out on the team and Mack continued with various other partners, all of whom took the name Moran. In 1937 the original Moran was working on a WPA project and shortly after died and was buried in a pauper's cemetery. To those who knew the original team, Mack and the subsequent Morans were never quite the same.

THE MORE THE MERRIER

There is probably not a better trio of wits in this country than Senator Ford, Harry Hershfield, and Joe Laurie, Jr. In these three gents you have all the schools of comedy: dry, bright, subtle, and broad. They are responsible for one of the most unique programs in American radio history, "Can You Top This?" On this show the listener sends in the jokes—dialect, pun, situation, Joe Miller. After being told by jovial jester Peter Donald, the trio of joke experts spontaneously tries to better them. It is the audience's laughter response, scientifically measured, which pronounces the winner. The trio rarely loses.

These three irrepressibles are not newcomers to the national laugh institution. Senator Ford has been going many years in vaudeville with his dry and tangy wit. Hershfield has attended over seven thousand luncheons and dinners, and has made as many after-dinner speeches in the past twenty-five years. His comic strip, "Abie Kabibble," has been famous for years, and he is rated with the late James J. Walker and with George Jessel as one of the nation's best after-dinner speakers.

Fred Allen has many people believing that Joe Laurie's parents were Joe Miller and Annie Laurie. "When the boy went into vaudeville," claims Allen, "he took his father's first name and his mother's last."

Laurie, columnist, writer, actor, producer, and collector—in addition to comedian—calls vaudeville the cradle of radio. Another product of New York's lower East Side, Joe Laurie, Jr., was the first radio performer to have a studio audience. Possessed of a natural wit and devoted to his art, it took Laurie eleven years to write his *History of Vaudeville*, a classic in its field.

I caught the trio in the middle of a baseball conversation at lunch one day. It went like this:

Ford: I remember in one All-Star game a rookie hit a home run in the second inning. Later in the game he was replaced by a substitute. Angered at being removed from the game, he stalked over to the manager and said, "If you ain't gonna let me play, I ain't gonna let you count my run."

Laurie: There's also a story about the All-Star team which went to heaven. St. Peter took one look at them and called down to the devil, "How about a baseball game?" "All right," said the devil, "but you're going to lose." St. Peter said he didn't see how he could lose with all those All-Star players. "Yes," the devil said, "but we have all the umpires down here."

Hershfield: Little Herkimer had never been to a baseball game in his life, so his father sent him to the All-Star game. A half hour later Herkimer came running home, all out of breath. He said he hadn't seen the game. "What happened?" asked the father. "Well," said Herkimer, "I bought my ticket and went into the Stadium. Forty thousand people got up and yelled . . . 'Run home . . . run home.' So I took the hint."

During one of their famous Clown Table Discussions, the wits delved into prizefighting:

Ford: There was a fighter who fought Joe Louis one time. He said, "You know, I would have won, except for the fact that when I came up for the third round, Louis and the crowd had gone home."

Dopey Dilldock was telling about his brother. He said, "Me brother punched Joe Louis in the nose." The other fellow said, "Gee, I'd like to shake hands with him." So Dopey said, "We ain't gonna dig him up just to shake hands with you."

Laurie: I like to go to Joe Louis's fights, because you get home so early.

Hershfield: Have you heard what a fellow said to Joe Louis? He said, "I had a dream about you, Joe. I dreamt I had a fight with you and I punched you in the nose and knocked you out." Louis said, "If you knocked me out, brother, you was dreaming."

Hershfield advocated a "laugh period" as part of every college curriculum at the centennial prom of the College of the City of New York, where he was given a "Doctor of Humor" degree by President Harry N. Wright.

In making the presentation to Mr. Hershfield, Dr. Wright said: "Doctor of Humor is a most appropriate title for such a man. Doctor in its colloquial sense has always referred to a healer. Harry, through the many years he has been a ranking comedian of importance, has always managed to have a ready laugh, a jovial joke, to cheer and inspire the weary and disheartened. . . .

"Medical science," the citation continued, "has not yet been able to equal Harry's brilliant ability to take a joke over a hundred years old, refurbish it, polish it, and present it to the world as an infant newborn, and listen to the squalls of hilarious laughter to herald the birth of something new being added. . . ."

In reply, Mr. Hershfield said, in part, "It is harder to prevent laughter than it is to create it. It is not an exact science and it's time that our halls of learning made it a part of study, both academically and in practice. The student will soon discover on leaving college that the human, intangible reactions predominate and that laughter is an ever-present deciding force."

As often as New Year's Day approaches, Senator Ford, Harry Hershfield, and Joe Laurie, Jr., meet for a Clown Table Discussion on resolutions and reservations. This chock-full-of-corn comment has become something of a ritual for the three famous gagsters. It's been known to go something like this:

Senator Ford: This New Year's Eve I'm going to have a wonderful time. I am going out with a bunch of Indians. I know they are Indians because they have reservations.

Harry Hershfield: Comes the resolutions! I am going to give up drinking—I gave up buying long ago.

Joe Laurie, Jr.: Just yesterday, I was talking to an old Scotchman. I said, "Are you going to buy a horn and help make it a noisy New Year's Eve?" He said, "No. There'll be plenty of noise around our house—I'm going to tear off a porous plaster from my son's chest!"

Ford had one of his favorite jokes backfire on him when he was rushed to St. Clare's Hospital, New York, for an emergency appendicitis operation. Joe called him on the telephone and reminded him of this one, which the Senator meekly admitted telling some time ago:

A man grabbed the phone and shouted, "Hurry, get me a doctor! I've got terrific pains in my side. I think it's my appendix!" The telephone operator cooed back, "Okay, dearie, I'll get you the Chief Operator!"

"The cost of living has always been high," claims Senator Ford, "but right now it's higher than ever.

"Take meat, for example," he says. "Now that you can get it, when you have to pay ninety cents a pound for steak, it's tough. Of course, when you pay thirty cents, it's tougher!!

"The nickel cigar is back, but it costs fifteen cents.

"We have to pay three cents for a two-cent stamp.

"The dollar haircut is here—that's the unkindest cut of all.

"And, of course, milk is so high, you'd think the cow jumped over the moon. The milkmen say they have to get twenty-three cents a quart for milk—that the cows can't do it any cheaper. That's bull! The cows used to do it for four cents, and make money.

"The only thing in late years that has gone down and stayed down," claims the sage wit, "is the Japanese Navy."

"It Pays to Be Ignorant" was a crazy-quiz radio satire which starred Tom Howard as Master Dementalist and Lulu McConnell, George Shelton, and Harry McNaughton as the Board of Nonsense Experts.

"Professor" Tom Howard tossed a question such as, "What

President was born on Lincoln's Birthday?" to his misinformed scholars, who promptly batted it around until it resembled a hysterical sparrow caught in a badminton game.

Each member of the cast was a veteran of vaudeville. Howard and Shelton worked together for years, performing on all the major networks. Lulu McConnell, belligerently raucous, had been on the stage since the age of four and was an established musical comedy actress at sixteen. Harry McNaughton, Oxford-accent utterer of elegant inanities, had appeared in more than thirty Broadway productions. He was the famed butler, Bottle, with Phil Baker.

"It Pays to Be Ignorant" rivaled "Can You Top This?" in that both shows dug up the pre-Joe Miller jokes, applied a simple "switch"—as gag rewriting is known in professional circles—and the old piece of furniture was ready for consumption by some five to ten million "new" listeners.

Duncemaster Tom Howard opened one show by asking for the definition of a bachelor. Snapped George Shelton: "A man who never makes the same mistake once."

Matrimony was another topic for discussion. "Marriage," Tom said, "is a serious word."

"You're right, Tom, but it's more than a word—it's a sentence."

"Why is a roomful of married people empty?" was a question asked of Shelton.

"Because there isn't a single person in it," answered Howard.

This type of gag material had developed the characters. For instance, Lulu told Howard she was having her voice cultivated. Said Tom: "You ought to have it plowed under."

Harry McNaughton, self-styled poet laureate, begged Tom to listen to one of his verses. "Well, go ahead if it will make you happy," Tom said, "but I won't like it."

Harry recited:

I have a bed that's rather short,
And yet it can't be beat.
Although it lets most of me in
It won't admit de-feat,

McNaughton had a grandfather who lived to be over ninety and never used glasses—he preferred to drink out of bottles.

During the war Harry was asked the definition of a peroxide blonde: “An established bleach-head,” was his retort.

George Shelton and the nitwit misinformation board got themselves involved in an argument on the physics of sound. “Say, George,” Tom asked, “can you give a good definition of an echo?”

“Why certainly,” Shelton retorted, “an echo is the only thing that can cheat a woman out of the last word.”

This show was one of the funniest, but one of the most poorly received, in recent radio history. It is hard to analyze the reasons. One person said that the comedy on this show was “twenty years behind.” But isn’t most comedy?

Family groups working together as teams get along about as well as a newly married couple with the in-laws, apparently. This, of course, is true not only in the comedy field, but also in music and dancing.

The three Marx Brothers, Harpo, Groucho, and Chico, have been part of comedy since before talkies. All are accomplished musicians, and so is brother Zeppo, who early left the group and went into the agency business in Hollywood. They were together in vaudeville with their mother and aunt and were known as the “Six Marxes.”

Harpo is the babyish, curly-headed deaf-mute who plays a harp on the slightest provocation unless distracted by a pretty girl.

Chico has an Italian accent and never shows one whit of intelligence.

Groucho, who now has his own rapidly-rising-Hooper television show, is the guy with the eternal cigar, the stooped, quick walk. In their hilarious films he carried most of the jokes while his two brothers slapped each other and generally made life complicated. Groucho’s wit is quick. His jokes follow hard on the heels of each other and you’ve got to be listening and thinking to catch it all. They, like the Ritz Brothers, have been together, apart, together, apart, together, apart, and so on and on and on. . . .

These are typical of Groucho’s gags:

When "Night at the Opera" was playing in New York, the manager just added a cartoon "to give the program a serious touch."

When a certain singer said he was going to sing a request, Groucho asserted, "The only request he ever got for that tune was to stop singing it."

A leprechaun overheard Harpo Marx state, "Gals who believe the way to a man's heart is through his stomach get a husband by hook or cook."

"Thank God, we live in a country where men who are eight feet tall or more are not looked down upon."

A group were discussing Groucho Marx's ad-lib talents. "That guy is so prolific," said one, "that he could twist a burp!"

Classic Marxism:

"I met a lady inventor the other day."

"Am I glad he invented ladies!"

"He's a falsie manufacturer. He lives off the flat of the land."

News item: "Stewart Granger, the British star who's headed for Hollywood, has separated from his wife, Elspeth March."

"Hmm. That's stepping off on the right foot."

My girl is a human gimmie-pig.

Sons of an actor father, Al Ritz was born in 1903, Jimmy Ritz in 1905, and Harry Ritz in 1908. All entered the theater world while still in their teens.

By 1925 they had consolidated their individual talents and broken into "vodvil" with what might be called a collegiate act. Their zany comedy was so different that in a few years they were appearing in such top revues of the period as Earl Carroll's "Vanities" and George White's "Scandals."

In 1936 they were signed by Fox to make their first feature-length film, "Sing, Baby, Sing." Their riotous comedy, a compound of elbowing, browbeating, and general (brotherly) mayhem, made an immediate hit. By 1943 they had fifteen pictures to their credit,

the best remembered probably being "Goldwyn Follies" and "Argentine Nights."

At that time increased difficulty in finding picture material for their singular style of comedy brought them back to the night-club circuit—where their routines could be a bit broader than the stern taboos of the Hays and Breen office allowed.

Pleasantly insane are Columbia's Three Stooges, the original Berserk Boys. They go crazy at regular intervals to the delight of thousands of fans. In real life they are Moe and Curly Howard and Larry Fine. They have appeared in such Columbia comedies as "G. I. Wanna Go Home," "Half Wits' Holiday," and many more.

Curly logically derives his name from his billiard-ball head. Larry is distinguished by fuzzy locks. Moe is normal to the eye except for his naïve bangs. It's a moot point which is funniest.

Moe and Curly were born in Manhattan and raised in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. They became interested in show business as youngsters, starting out to be serious actors.

Their brother Shemp joined the late Ted Healy's vaudeville act in 1922. When one of the acrobats was injured, Moe was asked to take his place for the rest of the week. That week lasted eight years. Ted Healy and His Stooges became one of vaudeville's highest-priced acts.

While on tour in "A Night in Venice" Larry Fine was added to the act. Moe and Shemp plucked him out of a Chicago café where he was playing the violin, rumped his hair, and put him to work.

In 1930 Ted Healy and His Stooges came to Hollywood for their screen debut in "Soup to Nuts," which Rube Goldberg wrote. Healy went back East and the Three Stooges started out on their own as Howard, Fine, and Howard, subtitled "Three Lost Soles." Their two-year engagement with RKO was one of the last long-term contracts in vaudeville.

When Shemp accepted a contract for the Glove Slingsers' pictures, Moe and Larry replaced him in the act with Curly Howard, who had been a guest comedy conductor with Orville Knapp's orchestra. Curly made the great sacrifice of his career, shaving his

head and his tenderly waxed mustache, and the Three Stooges became what they are today.

You love 'em or you hate 'em, but either way your reaction to their brand of comedy is a violent one. They take us back a few years to the real slapstick, up-and-at-'em comedy. They have brought Mack Sennett's pie-slinging scenes into later-day pictures.

“LOOK, PODNER, THAT’S A JOKE!”

Cartoonists have used Western characters time and time again as foils in comedy situations. Our Western movies, which have reached a still greater public recently through the medium of television, have brought to the fore such lovable characters as Gabby Hayes, Smiley Burnette, and Judy Canova. There is little need to quote listenership or box-office statistics about these grand entertainers. The fact that their names are familiar to most Americans is the greatest popularity vote they could want.

Their stories are as fabulous, as wonderful, as human laughter itself.

George “Gabby” Hayes, the bearded comedian, whose film characterizations of the cantankerous, garrulous old Westerner have made him a stand-by to millions of fans, has made nearly two hundred motion pictures since he came to Hollywood to “retire” in 1928.

Having rounded out twenty-five years in show business, he had an idea that vaudeville would die along with “talking pictures.” He figured the time was about ripe for him, a star of both the Orpheum and Keith circuits, to get out of the business for good. Besides, he had always wanted a garden, and had heard that flowers grow easily in California.

But George Hayes reckoned without Hollywood. He had been in the cinema capital a week when he was offered his first picture role. Since then he has portrayed the querulous, talkative miner, rancher, or prospector so many times he has stopped counting.

No natural Westerner, Hayes was born in Wellsville, New York, in 1885. His father was a hotel man with versatile side interests including oil wells and farming. He expected his sons to follow in his footsteps. Two of them did, but not George.

He took part in amateur theatricals from the time he was eight years old. Before he had finished high school, he ran away from home to join a traveling stock company. He did everything from singing illustrated songs to sweeping out the theater. He learned to dance and left the stock company to join a burlesque troupe, where he remained for twelve years. Then came vaudeville, where he became a top-liner.

His first characterization as the bearded Westerner was on the New York stage, and it all happened by accident. Hayes had just returned from a fishing trip. He hadn't shaved for weeks and was on his way to a barbershop when a producer friend saw him and promptly announced that Hayes was just the "type" for his new play.

He's been playing that "type" ever since, and boasts that it has been twenty-five years since he's seen a barber.

Bringing along his dozens of musical instruments and his famous horse, Black-Eyed Nellie, Smiley Burnette came to Columbia Pictures to carry on what had become, after many years, virtually a tradition in Western films.

As in all his past pictures, he is, so far as the plot is concerned, the best pal of the hero, and, so far as the audience is concerned, an engaging and versatile musical entertainer. In this dual capacity, Smiley came to fame in a long series of pictures with Gene Autry, his real-life as well as screen pal. When Autry went into the Army, Smiley carried on with Roy Rogers. Now, at Columbia, he is co-starred with Charles Starrett.

Smiley was born in the town of Summum, Illinois, the child of two ordained ministers. Throughout his school days he gave

expression to his musical talent by organizing his own band, playing in the school orchestra, and taking part in various student musicals.

About the time radio was beginning to sit up and take notice in the world of entertainment, a new 100-watt station opened near his home town. A furniture merchant offered Smiley, who had worked at a variety of honorable if professionally unrewarding jobs, the job of entertainer and announcer, and Smiley jumped at the chance. It wasn't long before he was the chief announcer, entertainer, manager, engineer, and general handy man.

While thus engaged, Smiley was brought to the attention of Gene Autry, then making a personal appearance in those parts. Autry was looking for an accordion player, so an appointment was arranged for him to meet Smiley. That was the beginning of a warm and lasting friendship. They made their debut as a radio team on the National Barn Dance.

In 1934, they left Chicago for Hollywood and their first picture, "The Phantom Empire." Believing themselves to be the world's worst actors, Smiley and Autry promptly left for Nashville, Tennessee, and another show. It was there the two startled performers received a wire offering a long-term contract. West they went, to create a legend—and with it fame and fortune.

Although Judy Canova is an outstanding madcap, she is also a sensitive soul at heart. And you'd better smile when you call her a hillbilly. Judy once had opera ambitions.

Judy has run the gamut of the entertainment field, starting in radio and thence, through vaudeville and musical shows in London and New York, to motion pictures and more radio.

She decided upon her mountaineer characterization not from choice, but because audience reaction demanded it. As a result she has parlayed a yodel into a successful career. There will come a time, though, muses Judy, when frilly, feminine chiffons and silks and pretty hairdos will have their day in her scheme of cinematic professional life.

Judy was born in Jacksonville, Florida, in November, 1916. Her father was a direct descendant of Antonio Canova, sculptor of

"The Three Graces." Her mother, Henrietta, was a descendant of Commodore Perry. Judy inherited a taste for the arts and a fighting spirit—a fair combination for any girl entering show business.

Judy, her sister Anne, and her brothers Pete and Zeke were taught at an early age to sing, dance, and play the piano and mandolin. She and her sister made their radio debut over a Jacksonville station when Judy was twelve.

Judy saved up enough money to go to New York by teaching dancing in Jacksonville. There Rudy Vallee was responsible for getting her night-club engagements, which she followed with tours of the United States as headliner of an RKO vaudeville unit. Returning to Broadway, she appeared in "Calling All Stars" and was featured in "Ziegfeld Follies of 1937" and "Yokel Boy."

After hitting with "Scatterbrain," her first film to win public acclaim, she became a national figure in the entertainment world, representing a special type of exuberant, twangy, boisterous comedy. Meanwhile, Judy has been highly successful on radio. Today she has her own national show and is still going great guns.

Here is a typical Canova caper:

Judy: "I wrote a song last year—it was about married life."
"Really? What was the name of it?"

Judy: "It was called: 'Darling, you turned the electric blanket too high and now I'm the toast of the town!'"

The Duke of Paducah, known to millions of radio fans as the guy with the sad tale of the too-tight shoes and the achin' feet, has been using the phrase, "I'm going to the wagon, these shoes are killin' me," for more than fifteen years.

The Duke has a library of more than a half million gags on 455 different subjects. Although he has been sponsored by several tobacco companies during his many years on radio, the Duke doesn't smoke. In fact he doesn't even perspire.

Neither rural nor a so-called hillbilly, the Duke is a clever writer and actor with the ability to take smart material and corn it up sufficiently.

Esmereldy, on the other hand, is a streamlined hillbilly. She

was born in the hill country, Middleton, Tennessee, which is about seventy-five miles from Memphis. When she was four, her family moved to Memphis. She was once a choir singer but now sings only hillbilly tunes. Her records have consistently been top sellers. The tune, "I Didn't Know the Gun Was Loaded," is a typical Esmerelda platter.

There have been radio Barn Dances the country over. The Missouri Valley Barn Dance on WNAX is typical of such rural humor. It travels in Nebraska, Minnesota, South Dakota, and Iowa, putting on a show each Saturday night. Smokey Ward is the emcee. His opening line goes something like this: "Here we are, folks, with lard on our hair and our ears pinned back like a bitin' sow."

Nationally, the WLS National Barn Dance, featuring the Dizz Kids, buck-toothed Jimmie James, Ted "Little Genevieve" Morse, Lulu Belle and Cousin Tilford, is a miracle in radio. It is one of the true veterans and has been going strong since it hit the air in April, 1924—and that, Podner, is a record few shows can boast!

Red Foley, whose records give the top crooners commercial competition, started radio's Saturday night Grand Ole Opry. High in the Hooper, it is a colorful variety of hillbilly talent, some with classical Western humor. It helps make evident that there is probably no comedy so typically American as the Western brand.

Part III

Where Is Comedy Going?



9



THE IMPROMPTU SET

There are a few comedians whose effect in the early days of radio was similar to that of Milton Berle on the television world. Radio was not visual, however, and they could work in a greater variety of acts.

The Happiness Boys, Billy Jones and Ernie Hare, who were also known as "The Interwoven Pair," proved themselves ace entertainers and radio salesmen for candy and socks. Ed Wynn reportedly was the first star to remove the glass studio curtain which separated the performers from the studio audience; though Eddie Cantor likes to take credit for being a pioneer in this movement too.

Miscellaneous and unspecialized entertainers began to make their entrance. The corn belt was bolstered by Uncle Ezra and his cracker-barrel philosophy when he appeared with the famous Hoosier Hot Shots on the National Barn Dance program. Early radio introduced over and under the ether two other screwballs, Stoopnagle and Budd. Low-pressure salesman Elmer Blurt, the famous character created by Al Pearce, made his debut with "I hope, I hope, I hope."

Some were wondering what would happen to the theaters, night clubs, and other live performance media—what with people rushing home to catch their favorite radio comedian much the same

as people now rush home and through dinner to catch the Burly Berle.

And those were the days when the disc jockey, the quiz master, the impromptu conversationalist genius of the airwaves, got their starts. These days you can find a disc jockey at the beginning of a radio day and you can also find him (if you're up late enough) adjusting the "Star Spangled Banner" on the turntable and putting a 50,000-watt station to bed.

Ralph Edwards is a good example of the ad-libbers, quiz men, and disc jockeys who have gone big time in comedy.

Soon after Ralph's birth on Friday, January 13, 1913, his family moved to Oakland, California, where he spent his boyhood. He entered the University of California, earned the reputation of excellence both in academic subjects and athletics, and graduated in 1935 with the intention of eventually becoming an English professor.

Then he struck a snag. The supply of teachers was far greater than the demand and there were no jobs available. So Edwards decided to make use of the radio training he had acquired during part-time work in local stations as writer, actor, announcer, and producer.

He hitchhiked to New York with great determination to break into big-time radio. After months of knocking around without turning up a penny, he landed a part-time job as an announcer, and within a few years was one of the most sought-after announcers on the air. Three years after his arrival in New York, he hit on the program idea which was to make him famous. The year was 1940 and the program, his "Truth or Consequences."

Edwards has proved a theory supported many times before he put his show on: "People want to let go. Give them a chance and they'll ride an elephant, or throw a custard pie or be a target for one." Too many people have done just this on "Truth or Consequences" to let anyone dispute the facts.

Robert MacGregor Hawk was just nineteen years old when he sauntered into a Chicago cigar store one warm summer night. As

he entered the shop, he heard someone on the radio reading poetry. Hawk was working for a loan company then. In his pocket was the draft of a contract to teach at Northwestern College, Alva, Oklahoma. That contract would make him perhaps the youngest college teacher in the United States.

In the cigar store Bob listened to the radio voice and was inspired. He phoned the radio station for an audition.

The job, reading poetry on the air two nights a week—gratis—went to Hawk. Radio so enthralled him, he decided to abandon the teaching career and stay in Chicago.

For eleven months, Hawk's radio work brought no cash. The loan company job having terminated, he ate by carrying mail, teaching dramatics, vending typewriters and pianos, soda-jerking, and operating a telephone switchboard.

Then Bob landed a seven-day, fifteen-dollar-a-week job. On that fat salary his duties included reading news items telling, among other things, how various other workers in our nation were underpaid.

Hawk has never left radio. He's covered everything from grand opera, wrestling, and boxing matches, to big league baseball games and what he claims was the first polo game ever reported by radio, air races, and the arrival of the Graf Zeppelin.

His successful ad-libbing dates from a Chicago program of recordings. It was his job to make some introductory remarks as the records were changed. One day, hardly realizing what he was saying, he used the expression "red-hot and low-down," and added some humorous comment.

Bob felt like apologizing, but the rest of the staff congratulated him on the "swell program." Listeners turned in enthusiastic comment (just helping prove, by the way, that comedians don't know when they click), and from that day on the program was listed as "Red-Hot and Low-Down."

Then, topping it all off, sponsors became interested, and Bob's income tax skyrocketed. Now he has one of radio's top-rated programs. His quiz show gives him, of course, the best kind of outlet for his spontaneous and ever-ready wit.

Bob told a contestant about a wonderful hen he once owned.

"She laid such big eggs," he declared, "that we only needed eight to make a dozen." And that is typical of Hawkian humor.

Jack Kirkwood not only writes successful comedy shows, but he plays in them, always sustaining top-level hilarity. At one time the replacement for Jerry Colonna on the Hope show, Jack now has his own program.

A native of the Emerald Isle, Kirkwood migrated to Canada to establish a reputation as an architect. Fortuitously a part in a touring production of "Madame X" opened to him at a time when he was laying all too few cornerstones. So dazzled was he by these first footlights that he forsook building homes for building shows.

Touring the United States and Canada with dramatic stock companies, he appeared with the famous Nance O'Neill in "Camille," "Man and Superman," and "Magda." But clowning backstage was his real forte—so he deserted the tragic muse for musical comedy. And came, figuratively and literally, quite a way.

In those early days, there was a wide variety of audiences for young Jack—in the Philippines, Australia, China, Japan, and Mexico. Somewhere in between continental and transcontinental tours he managed to write more than four hundred comedy sketches.

One day Kirkwood accepted an invitation with a Shakespearean company in Portland, Oregon, and did a recitation over a local station. The owner-announcer-producer stepped out of the studio for just a minute. It stretched into quite a few, and Kirkwood was left with a live mike and nothing left to say. He picked up a nearby ukelele and started a patter of talk and songs. The fan letters that poured into the station were so numerous that Jack has been part of radio ever since—making listeners laugh with:

"I spent the last week end of my vacation at a ranch out in the valley . . . the Bar Nobody Ranch. All I did was ride horseback—ride, ride, ride. Boy what a weak end!"

"D'ya mind if I jump up on your head?" Jack asked one of the stooges on his show. "I feel like a walk around the block."

"Yer nothing but a low-down, contemptible, scurvy, pusil-

lanimous, mangy, flat-headed, yaller, whinin' prairie-rat," Gene Lavalle boomed at him.

"Flat-headed?" repeated Jack. "Ah'm *not* flat-headed!"

"Will you love me when my hair has turned to silver?" an actress asked Jack. "Why not?" answered Jack. "I've loved you through five other shades."

And . . . "Do you mind if I stand on my head? I want to turn things over in my mind."

Peter Lind Hayes is an ex-G.I. sergeant who in his first nightclub appearance at the Copacabana completely captured the enthusiastic acclaim of both public and critic. A purely natural comedian, he burst in with an original, fresh style. He can sing hell out of a song and can even tell Joe Frisco stories for twenty minutes. Even people who never heard of Frisco fall off their chairs.

There's no telling how far Hayes can go. Adaptable to anything from saloons to television, Peter is the best new talent to come along in years. With his wife, Mary Healy, he has been scoring in night clubs and TV. Mary has been called the cutest light comedienne to develop since the turn of the century.

Peter is the son of Grace Hayes, and anybody who remembers vaudeville will remember Grace. She was tall and straight and had a smile that went from ear to ear. She dressed more smartly than Mrs. Harrison Williams and had more poise than Joe Louis. With that for a background, how could Peter miss?

Perhaps Phil Baker's brotherly love for the "Take It or Leave It" contestants, whom he helped with broad hints as they teetered on the brink of losing a fortune, stems from the city of his birth, Philadelphia, where he was born August 24, 1898.

More likely, however, Phil feels inclined to help all struggling contestants because the days of his youth were filled with struggle—the struggle of a New York urchin to earn a penny. His folks had moved to the big town when he was still an infant. He used to earn twenty-five cents a week by gathering firewood in vacant lots. He

ran errands for a doctor after school and in six months had saved the ten dollars he needed for his first accordion, an old-style flashy affair.

He taught himself to play the piano and accordion, without so much as an instruction book, and an early hobby of his was giving Sunday afternoon concerts on the fire escape.

When Phil went on the stage professionally he introduced a heckling stooge. Later he carried this idea into radio when he started broadcasting in 1933 with Beetle and Bottle.

On his present show he can fit in about twenty or thirty good jokes:

During a broadcast, quizmaster Phil Baker was talking to a housewife contestant on the hardships of homemaking.

"Well, you can avoid dishpan hands," Phil said, "if you will put the two things I advise in the dishwater."

"Fine," his domestic guest retorted. "What are they?"

"Your husband's hands," Phil shot back.

Once when Baker was exchanging recipes with a housewife he explained how to make "Snow Cake."

"Take a pound of snow, cover with molasses, and place in a hot oven. In ten minutes—s'no cake."

Phil is able to get his contestants' confidence as soon as they approach the mike. Commiserating with a young married lad one evening, Phil was informed that the newlywed had to accompany his wife on shopping tours. That reminded the quizmaster of a recent experience of his own.

"My wife talked me into going shopping with her yesterday," Phil said, "and what a time I had. We saw one fellow spending a thousand dollars on an outfit for his girl and was I surprised. I couldn't imagine anyone using all that lettuce on one tomato."

Engineering is an odd approach to a career in clowning, but that's the way Ward Wilson took it. Degrees from the University of Pennsylvania started him in radio as a field engineer. And he had a two-year stretch at the technical end of the mike before he gave up dials and decibels for gags and guffaws.

One of the busiest comics in radio, Wilson likes to create his characters to order. A director will tell him, for instance, what he thinks a show needs; Wilson puts something together to fill the bill. Back in the thirties, a character was needed on the Phil Baker show to work from the audience and vary the routine. Wilson came through with "Beetle"—a character who heckled Baker in a cavernous voice. Ward became one of the show's highlights and had a hard time getting people to call him by his own name years afterward!

Ward, who was born in Trenton, New Jersey, in 1903, has refused four Broadway offers, but has made some movie shorts. He thinks he'd make a good radio director and intends to be one some day. If he can direct as well as he can act, the shift shouldn't be difficult.

This is Wilson chatter:

Ward admitted that his mother found him in a bargain basement. "She must have—my fingers are all different sizes!"

Once, he says, he fought a lion singlehanded.

"How did you come out?" he was asked.

"Singlehanded," said Ward.

One of the greatest of current mimics, Ward is extremely active in radio, TV, and film work. His voice is used for puppets, cartoon characters, and to impersonate other famous entertainers.

Earl Wilson in his famous *New York Post* syndicated column said:

"Doc Rockwell, who's alleged by his friend Fred Allen to be making a living in Maine exhibiting live Democrats in a sideshow, had come down from Boothbay Harbor to look over our sappy city. 'I don't see anybody very satisfied in this town,' he said. 'It's a rat race. A little of it is plenty, like garlic.'

"Doc, star of stage and radio and a fisherman by hobby, asks for a kind word for lobsters. He knows many lobsters intimately, and says the lobsters are not to blame. He didn't say what they're not to blame for.

"‘Lobsters are just dumb,’ Doc said, hunching his shoulders and squinting and curling his finger to look like a dumb lobster.

"‘I’m very healthy. I was never sick till I went on a health diet. I had to stop work two weeks. I got well when I ate. On this health diet, I was starving to death. The juices in your stomach have to digest something. If there’s no food, they digest your stomach.’

"‘I suggested Doc must be quite a character in Maine.

"‘The tourists,’ he said, ‘see me sloshing around in my oil-skins and say, ‘Hey, lobster man!’ I tell ‘em weird stories.

"‘I’m supposed to be this old grimy lobster man with my big boots. I say to ‘em, ‘There’s something in my boots.’ I take off my boot and sock, and they see the grimy old lobster man has red rouged toenails. I can’t stand this rat race in New York,’ said Doc. ‘Only for a few days.’”

Eddie Dunn, who has now made a name for himself in television, was born in Waco, Texas. He did his first radio program on a local station there in 1925, as part of a team called Munn and Dunn.

He was popular in radio in Dallas and Chicago, and in 1943 came East to break into the New York circuit. He was immediately successful, and besides working as emcee and announcer for several coast-to-coast shows, he had his own show, “Fun With Dunn,” where the ad libs were plenty—and good.

To keep Art Linkletter’s NBC program “People Are Funny” up to its high rating, in early July, after a summer vacation, a small group of writers and producers start meeting three times a week to map stunts and prepare the first broadcast of the season—usually for a new time spot.

“The basic idea of ‘People Are Funny’ has always been to entertain rather than to offer huge prizes,” Linkletter says.

That is why the madness of “People Are Funny” is the kind calculated to produce sidesplitting, unadulterated bedlam. The majority of the gimmicks on the show require that contestants go out and participate in some situation aimed at proving (1) that

most people are not only funny, but (2) they are good sports and intelligent as well. Naturally, on occasion, the jokes backfire, but the batting average of the popular program has been amazingly high during its years on NBC.

"Yes," claims Linkletter, "our show is a hardy perennial, and we're kind of proud that we never have, and never will, lose sight of the fact that we're in business to provide a half hour of ram-bunctious fun once a week."

Like radio, television has found the need for more comedians. A comic like Ben Blue, who needs to be seen to be appreciated, who traveled from burlesque to movies to radio, is welcomed with open arms to video. Radio and TV, too, have drafted comics from all types of shows and programs. The disc jockey, for instance, has found that his public will laugh at witticisms he creates; and with little encouragement has been buying joke books, funny recitations, and even full comedy presentations in an attempt to become the comic of tomorrow.

How did disc jockeys come to join the Humor Parade? Most disc jockeys are not comics but some of our best comics were disc jockeys.

Robert Q. Lewis, as a case in point, got his big break at CBS when he replaced Arthur Godfrey in a summer series. Now he stands on his own, with a major TV network show. This ex-disc jockey was around New York for a long time spinning platters and it was his public who spun him out of a studio control room and before the TV cameras. He is of the lackadaisical school, and strikes one as a natural comedian, that member of the family or friend who you can always expect to have a bright saying or a funny crack on his lips.

Chicago's gift to the disc-jockey laugh sweepstakes is Dave Garroway, who faces the mike resplendent in horn-rimmed glasses of the Lloyd variety, bow ties of the oldtime vaude stage, and \$150 suits, well draped. The elegant Mr. Garroway has won several disc-jockey polls and early in 1950 came to the attention of the nation by being profiled by such magazines as *Look* and *Life*.

Dave Garroway deserves some sort of citation for his new and refreshing approach to the comedy field. His TV technique has been cited by critics as clearly revealing the wholesome respect he has for his audiences. He slants his easygoing comedy style at two or three people relaxing in their living room. The hackneyed stooge, the custard-pie slapstick, the insult clichés, and the Berle or Hope formula are missing. There are no studio audiences, because Garroway believes that their reaction and that of the folks at home are distinctly different.

New Yorker Alan Courtney, another platter spinner and slangy ad-libber, is a product of the borscht circuit and can toss in an emcee job at a night club or a summer resort with all the finesse of a Hope, Crosby, or Berle.

Out Hollywood way, Bill Anson takes the cake for his comedy relief between records. Bill is a great impressionist and an expert dialectician.

The situation is in reverse for Ray Perkins, a stage, screen, and radio comedian for several years, who is all the rage as a disc jockey in Denver, Colorado.

From the James household hails a guy named Dennis. To show his aptitude for the comedy field, he tackles wrestling announcing and a running commentary to mothers on the same day. His program "O.K., Mothers" gives advice to the gal Dad leaves behind with the little ones every morning. And at night he entertains Dad, by laboriously describing each and every hold of Gorgeous George over The Golden Superman, complete with sound effects. If, for instance, a headlock has to be described, Brother Dennis breaks pencils before the mike just to let you know that the Golden Superman is probably breaking the bones of Gorgeous George's frame.

From the movies and Broadway to TV came Jules Munshin, another New Yorker, who went three thousand miles away to end up on Broadway. Jules is a borscht circuit comic who seasoned himself in show business singing with George Olsen's orchestra, working in vaudeville, and entertaining his fellow servicemen. Jan Murray is another product of the borscht-circuit-comedian proving

grounds. A member of the currently popular flippant school of comedy, he has been making a pun work in night clubs, radio, and now TV.

One of the new shows has caused a mild revolution in entertainment circles. For who would have thought that a puppet show—and one originating out of Chicago no less—would catch on nationally, riveting an enormous audience of youngsters to their late-afternoon sets? Proof of “Kukla, Fran, and Ollie’s” attraction is its evident popularity with the presupper tavern crowd, who more often than not can be found gazing up at the puppets over a glass of beer or something stronger—and liking it!

Kukla, Fran, and Ollie got their start at the New York World’s Fair of 1939, performing regularly there. Both hand puppets, Kukla the human and Ollie the dragon are manipulated and voiced by Burt Tillstrom, who owns the production. But it wasn’t until Fran Allison, a Chicago singer and actress, joined them that they shot into prominence. Fran, who acts as the straight-man, believes in them as Alice does in the folk of Wonderland. Using news-of-the-day situation comedy, always up to date, this show has showed the way and led the way for the current boom in puppetry. And time it was for a revival of this ancient and magical art.

Few Broadway shows give the new comic a break—especially shows like those in which the Hartmans participate. But every now and then a bud pops through. With the show “Tickets, Please,” Roger Price hit the comedy big time. Price had been a stooge for Jack Carson and Bill Goodwin on their radio shows in Hollywood. A round of night-club work in New York at the Blue Angel, the Village Vanguard, and Café Society Downtown filled out his professional accomplishments. Bob Hope thought him funny, too, and had used him with his USO show during the war.

Danny Thomas has always found the intimate night clubs easier to play than radio. He has been successful, though, in the movies. Anyone who has seen his flat-tire routine will rate him an A-plus for pantomime. Yet, when comics like Lenny Kent and Jack Carter come on the scene with the same type of comedy, one wonders whether in the course of a few years the visual acceptance

of comedy through TV will make a good comedian a great one.

Comedians had to learn their ABC's all over again when television presented itself at the midcentury mark. Such veterans as Allen, Benny, Cantor, Durante were as baffled over how they would grind out a weekly program as was newcomer Sid Caesar.

Allen, for instance, tried TV twice, blamed the difficulty he had in transition from radio to TV on the fact that he had been in vaudeville eighteen years before. He nevertheless admitted that he was not sorry for the weeks of experimentation in early TV. Durante, on the other hand, who found "TV a dilemma," according to *Variety*, scored the No. 1 resounding smash among the "show biz vets." Cantor was so sold on TV that he moved East to take up all offers. Benny is of the Cantor school. He is TV-sold and thinks he has the tried-and-true formula.

No matter what the medium of entertainment, there are still four stages to the acceptability of a laugh. There is the chuckle, the yak, the bellylaugh, and lastly the boff. With TV, comedians can more and more reach that elusive fourth. In radio they were lucky to get past the second or third. Facial expressions account for the boffs and these men know it.



10



MUSIC HATH CHARM—AND CHUCKLES, TOO

Music has laughed with us for generations. There was probably a funny song long before there was ever a Joe Miller joke, but lately comic music has taken a new turn. Now presentation, rather than words or music, is the key.

How many night clubs have you been to recently where there was not only dance music but comedy furnished by the crew behind the baton? "Hillbillies" have gone into the ritziest Park Avenue parlors—not as ballad artists, but as sophisticated comedians. "Cocktails for Two" has become an atomic highball of hilarity; and even big-name singers (Jo Stafford for one) have gone into the business of making you laugh at them, with them, and to the music. . . .

Frank and Milt Britton, leaders of one of the first slapstick bands, employed breakaway violins, bust drums, and musicians falling off bandstands. Benny Meroff doubled as leader and virtuoso of many instruments which he played front and center, while the sidemen performed a variety of heckling gags.

In 1935, Riley and Farley, a novelty jazz band, came into the Onyx Club, Fifty-second Street haunt of the top swing musicians of New York. Their biggest novelty was "The Music Goes 'Round and 'Round." They did comedy routines, throwing custard pies

and eggs, water squirting out of fake eyeglasses, tearing instruments apart, and heckling the customers.

Stuff Smith followed. His hot jazz outfit specialized in comedy, while still drawing the tops in the music business. "I'se A-Muggin'" and scores of parodies on the top tunes of the day kept sophisticated audiences in hysterics.

Freddie Schnikelfritz had his corn combo and carried on where the Brittons and Meroffs left off. But he met with only moderate success. He added a washboard and jug and used about five men. They recorded for Decca, but corn tunes, not burlesques of standard pops, as did Spike Jones later.

In 1942, Spike Jones started the routine that was to rocket him to recognition. A sideman with John Scott Trotter, he used Hollywood studio musicians who joined in the shenanigans just as a gag. When RCA Victor sent out a pressing of "Der Führer's Face," Spike spent his last nickel journeying to New York to see Martin Block and have the disc jockey present it on the air. Block plugged it and Spike began to accumulate a fortune. As he progressed, Spike smartly invested profits in bettering his routine, enlarging the personnel of his company—eventually building it from a seven-piece corn band to a fifty person musical revue that fascinated a nation.

Spike's routines follow a sure-fire formula. The introductions begin straight in musical good taste. But before sixteen bars are through all hell breaks loose. Every conceivable instrument (and noninstrument) is used for sound effects—and some that it is safe to say were never conceived but just happened!

In the interim, two other corn outfits gained wide acclaim with their comedy specialties. One was the Korn Kobbliers, successful in club, radio, and television work. The other was Harry Ranch and his Kernels of Korn. Ranch, former jazz-band sideman, formed his six-man combo in the Army and kept it together when he returned to civilian life.

Several Spike Jones men have left the orchestra to form their own comedy bands. Most successful is Red Ingle. Red is a thoroughly schooled legitimate-theater and operetta singer. In organizing his own band, after leaving Spike, he was extremely careful

to steer clear of any association with his former employer, and leaned to comedy hillbilly and hillbilly treatment of popular songs, such as "Timtayshun" (Temptation), which was his inaugural platter and a nation-wide smash. Many in the trade feel that his later disc, "Cigarettes and Whisky and Wild, Wild Women," would have been an equally big seller, particularly a juke box favorite of national acclaim, had not Capitol been engaged in giving priority to its campaign on "Nature Boy" at the time.

Mickey Katz, another Spike alumnus, has his own band, and records for Victor, Spike's label; his main effort, however, is on comic Yiddish numbers.

Of course the country is flooded with other corn bands, but none with the name and caliber of Jones. They work locally and through various territories, and all meet with comparative success in their communities. For many people, either in elaborate night clubs or tiny taverns, enjoy their music served with comedy. However, the dispensers must be temperate. An overdose will kill any attraction specializing in this art.

Nor is Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong exactly a morbid character. He dishes out laughs in both his songs and monologues. So too, does the progressive jazz virtuoso, Dizzy Gillespie, who is always good for laughs both in word and voice. Jazz lovers may deny this point, saying these are merely natural peculiarities of these characters, but even in the commercial side of the theater, many doff their caps to the comedy deliveries of these leaders. However, both these great musicians are deadly serious when they put their horns to their lips.

The "commercial-type" bands always turn to comedy as a means of putting themselves across. Sammy Kaye's "So You Want to Lead a Band" contests are big laugh-getters, even though, primarily, their purpose is to uncover lads with a real talent for waving a baton. Dick Jurgens has a whole library of comedy numbers. Guy Lombardo, Wayne King, and Freddy Martin are perhaps the most conservative, but even they have their novelty numbers to evoke chuckles now and then. The real bellylaughs, however, are out of their line.

Tommy Dorsey has a whole one-hour stage show of novelties

and satirical impressions of radio programs and other bands, which he uses in theaters and on concert tours.

Horace Heidt, too, still has his laugh-getters. Heidt has studied delivery—as well as singing, baton twirling, various instruments, and acting—and at one time, in the days of his old Brigadiers, he used to cue in his company behind him by waving his coattails. That was meant to be funny and to indicate that they should laugh. Laughing is always contagious, so the audience out front would pick it up.

Alvino Rey, an offspring of the Heidt school, with his King Sisters, graduates of the same outfit, had his own band which had the peculiar knack of combining fine music, even in the particular tastes of the jazz experts, with good comedy. This band had a full one-hour show that included various forms of comedy, gagging up the presentation of the various instrumental soloists, burlesquing same, doing a comedy opera, etc., etc. Unfortunately, just as this band hit the top (\$12,500 per week) bracket in bands, the armed forces beckoned and the organization bit the dust.

Stan Kenton, the dean of progressive jazz and extreme campaigner on this subject, still broke up his concerts at the halfway mark each night with a fifteen-minute comedy routine using his sidemen, all top virtuosi in the complicated formula of progressive jazz, to do comedy impressions, imitations, dialogue routines, and other short shots. Though viewed with some disgust by the noncommercial jazz fans and critics, the routine was generally popular with Mr. Average Patron.

Louis Prima and Tony Pastor, themselves accomplished comedians along with being fine musicians, carry the flair for laugh-getting into about half the tunes in their band libraries.

Leon Belasco left the music business to become a comedian in the movies. Yet when he had his own band, a society outfit, which played the swank St. Moritz Roof, New York City, its home campaign grounds, there was little evidence of any comedy. Society bands, along with most strictly artistic jazz units, rarely stray to the laugh field.

It is important in most bands to have one man who doubles as instrumentalist and comic. This gent will play his horn quite

unobtrusively most of the night, but now and then will get in the spotlight to sing his comedy songs or, completely unprovoked, will hop up from his section and let out a hoot or wisecrack while the maestro is presenting a number.

Vaughn Monroe built Ziggy Talent, who first hit national fame by singing "Sam You Made the Pants Too Long," into a solo star and individual recording artist. For quite some time he also carried an extra attraction, a regular comic from the variety and night-club circuits.

Butch Stone has been a mainstay in the Les Brown band since its early days, except for several months when he went on tour with his own jazz aggregation. Butch found it more comfortable and less of a headache working for the successful Brown, however; and giving up his leader ideas, resumed with the Duke Blue Devil, to become a specialist in comedy routines.

When the old Casa Loma band hit the top, helping to inaugurate swing music, Pee Wee Hunt was the big funnyman. Later Pee Wee formed his own unit and recorded a comedy version of "Twelfth Street Rag" that was voted, oddly, by disc jockeys to be the top jazz record of 1948!

By the same token, many leading comedians have tried to be musicians. Buddy Lester, like his brother a comedian, plays at least a fair trumpet and, when working with a band, winds up his act with some attempts at joining it on the final number. Pat Harrington, who gained most fame as an Irish tenor and quickest wit at the old 18 Club, is a drummer and once had his own band. Bert Frohman, the emcee, also took a fling at being a band leader. Frankie Hyers, another 18 Club alumnus, and feature star of many Broadway shows, fancies himself a trombone player and has a slip horn presented to him by Tommy Dorsey.

Tommy Dorsey once made a record called "Are All My Favorite Bands Playing or Am I Dreaming?" in which he ridiculed the sweet and saccharine bands of the time, burlesquing Shep Fields, Guy Lombardo, Eddy Duchin, and others, with a comedy vocal satirizing Ray Noble done by jazz tenor man Bud Freeman. RCA Victor released the record, done by the Clambake Seven with arrangers Axel Stordahl and Paul Weston manipulating the washtubs

(for the Shep Fields “rippling” effect), but no mention was made of Dorsey and his band on the label.

Jimmy Dorsey made some comedy records too, but not incognito. Even Benny Goodman did a satirical platter in which he himself did his first vocal chorus. None, it seems, are beyond the reach of comedy.

Mousie Powell, who served his apprenticeship with the Britton band, formed his own small group after Frank died and worked New York and Eastern night clubs—small size. Incidentally, Jack Powell, a brother of Mousie, is recognized as a number one comedy drummer, having done a blackface chef routine in vaudeville for years.

Jerry Colonna, who rose to fame as a Hollywood comedian, started his career as a trombone player and was rated one of the number one men around CBS. Jerry, who also used to play with Ozzie Nelson, confined his comedy routine to entertaining fellow musicians around the Onyx Club in the early thirties, until Joe Helbock, owner of the spot, finally convinced him, after months of argument, to give up his horn and take a crack at Hollywood as a comic. Music lost, but films and Bob Hope won.

Jack Smart, a radio comic who later became “The Fat Man,” used to spend his spare time sitting in on the jam sessions at the Onyx Club as a frustrated drummer. He’d play a suitcase with whisk brooms. F. Chase Taylor, also known as Colonel Stoopnagle, suffered from a similar affliction in those days around the Famous Door.

Nor should we overlook Kay Kyser as a comic. Kay not only specialized in that department as a band leader, but he also made several movies as a comedian. He developed the now standard comic character, Ish Kabibble, in his old band.

Victor Borge is a funny guy at or away from the piano. Mischa Auer, when doing personal appearances, does his routine as a pianist, playing first some good piano, then doing some comedy playing, using grapefruit, elbows, feet, and what have you. Buddy Cole, normally a conservative pianist, has done several West Coast concerts where he’s scored tremendous successes, not merely because of his expert pianistics, but for his surprise informal comic

commentaries, during and between numbers. A faculty not even his family knew he possessed!

Joe Reichman, billed as "The Pagliacci of the Piano," is a clown all during the dance sets of his band and is liable to walk off the stand, wander around the room, and do anything else unconventional for a piano-playing maestro. Dick Himber, who enjoys as much reputation as a magician as he does as a maestro, is another man who'll come through with some surprise laughs now and then. Russ Morgan, a top musical authority, having been at one time musical director of Brunswick Records, in late years and particularly since the advent of television, is becoming better known as a monologist and comedian.

And don't forget the Marx Brothers—Chico at the piano and Harpo at the zither. Chico at one time became a band leader but met with little success. Perhaps a hit record by the Chico Marx band would have made the difference.

It is standard formula with dance bands playing one-niters to stage a "show," usually around 11:30 or midnight. In the show, the band will present whatever comedy numbers—not in the dance tempo—it has in the books.

One of the earlier comedy routines with a dance band was Paul Whiteman's, when he'd present Paul Small, a man of equal stature, mustached, and bearing an amazing resemblance to the "King," doing a fast dance routine. This was geared to shock the audience, who of course didn't expect Whiteman to be that agile. He wasn't. But Small was. So much so that he later became one of the leading agents of show business.

Gene Krupa has several gag numbers on tap but delivers them only when he has the "right" audience. He's been building up a comedy library with an eye on television. Gene himself is a great showman. A burlesque on Art Mooney's "Four Leaf Clover" inaugurated this new Krupa library. A fast follow-up was a take-off on bop fanaticism.

Comedy has played a great part in the success of music publishing firms. People like being either sentimental or hilarious. For every "I'll Never Smile Again" or "Riders in the Sky," there's always been something like "Yes, We Have No Bananas," "Knock

Knock," "Three Little Fishes," "Doin' What Comes Naturally," "When Frances Dances With Me," and so on, forever and ever—as long as people will laugh.

Then there's the parody department, highlighted by such talented exponents as Eddie Davis, the other half of Leon and Eddie's, and Joe E. Lewis. This is confined mainly to the night-club performer, with an occasional vaudevillian (a new art) taking a fling at it. It's a popular form of Americana, and the boys in the service during World War II twisted many of the best-known ballads into really funny numbers, all to the good of morale. One of the most noteworthy of these, and one claimed by many composers, was the parody on "Begin the Beguine." Part of it went, "Oh don't let them clean up the latrine, let it stay, let me dream about the many times I went there—oh, the many happy hours that I spent there—don't let them clean up—the latrine." *Variety* ran many a story re the claimants but authorship on this was never settled. There are some who remember a party in Newark, when songwriters Irv Miller and Vic Mizzy ad-libbed such a parody much to the amusement of the guests. That was pretty early in the war and probably an early entry in the latrine sweepstakes. Eddie Davis will long be remembered for his parody on "She Came Rollin' Down the Mountain," and Joe E. Lewis will go down in history for his rendition of "Sam, You Made the Pants Too Long."

Of course, with comedy in music comes a whole new vocabulary. Spike Jones issued one which was a concerted effort to run down the traditional instruments. Included are such lexicomic lusus as: cello—the thing that comes in six flavors; trumpet—a street-walker; French horn—Boyer's smeller; piccolo—the thing that goes in the middle when the mustard's on top; fiddle—faddle's partner; oboe—publisher of the *News*.

Born in New York City, Beatrice Kay toured the country when she was but an infant. Her father had given up the study of medicine in favor of stage direction, and her mother was a theatrical costume designer. By the time she was six, Beatrice was a professional actress, receiving thirty-five dollars a week in Colonel McCauley's famous stock company in Louisville, and at the age

of seven was appearing as "character woman" in children's acts produced by W. W. Wolf of Philadelphia. Her formal education took place at the Professional Children's School and at Mount Kisco Prep, where some of her schoolmates were Gene Raymond, Helen Chandler, Ruby Keeler, and Milton Berle.

After appearing successively in stock, vaudeville, and musical comedy, Beatrice was stricken with a severe case of laryngitis and was warned by a throat specialist that she must refrain from singing for at least a year. But Beatrice, who literally "sang for her supper," kept on and gradually her voice developed an odd, raspy quality completely unsuited to the operetta career which she was planning. Yet what seemed at the time to be a tragedy turned out to be a boon—her new voice became more popular than her old! Beatrice sang her old-time songs at Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe in New York and was signed for the radio.

Her renditions of old-time ballads such as "I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now" and "Heaven Will Protect the Working Girl" are the result of hours of study. Edison cylinder records of Anna Held, Maggie Kline, Eva Tanguay, and others whose songs she sings are played over and over. "I don't imitate anyone," she explains, "but I try to capture the mood of those who introduced the songs. As a child, I saw many famous persons singing the songs I now sing."

Writers like to say that Martha Raye made a hole-in-one with her big mouth and her vociferous warm comedy and songs. Born in Butte, Montana, she is the daughter of a very famous vaudeville team, Reed and Hooper. Like many another famous personality of the show-business world, Martha started her trouping when she was literally an infant.

At sixteen, however, she headed out on her own as a singer and comedienne and joined Paul Ash's orchestra, where she sang and did many musical-comedy routines. Martha made several pictures but the public found that the new personality, Cass Daley, had many of the natural comedy abilities of Martha and was more of a polished comedienne. Martha came back in 1947 with a superbly funny performance in Chaplin's "Monsieur Verdoux."

Cass Daley works longer hours than a country doctor. Cass was born in Philadelphia. Finances in the Daley family were never anything but low. In fact, they were so low that when Cass celebrated her fourteenth birthday she went to work in a hosiery mill as a stocking trimmer.

This went on until she was fired. The boss caught her imitating him before an interested audience of fellow workers.

Her next public—and more fortunate—performance was given in “The Old Mill,” a Camden night club. Cass got up and sang a song on a dare. The management promptly offered her a job.

Some months later the Camden airport was taken over by a Walkathon Contest. Cass sold herself as an entertainer for the fifteen-minute intermissions between walks. Red Skelton, who was just getting started, was the master of ceremonies.

From the Walkathon, Cass moved on to a better job at a night-club spot in Westchester, New York, and there met Kinsella, whom she married a few months later. It was Kinsella who persuaded Cass to stop singing straight and swing her numbers with emphasis on comedy.

After that it was full speed ahead for Cass, and she soon went into a featured spot in the “Ziegfeld Follies,” with Fanny Brice, Bobby Clark, and Gypsy Rose Lee.

In 1938 she went abroad and played the English and Scotch music halls. Returning home she went into “Yokel Boy” with Joe Penner. More vaudeville followed. She was playing a five-show day in Cleveland when Paramount whirled her into a studio contract.

Night-club music has yet another genius. And again here is one who has to be seen to be adequately appreciated. Television is seeing that you do, though it can't quite be the sophisticated act she does in the swankier night clubs. Kay Thompson's business is razzing the stage stars and satirizing her sex. Kay is a real string bean, figuratively speaking, and as *Life* said, “a savage caricature of Beatrice Lillie.”

But besides her activities as a captivatingly funny singing actress, with credits in most of the entertainment media, Kay is

also a highly successful song writer. If you don't think we mean successful, then convince yourself with her salary in one night spot —\$15,000 a week.

Here's her take-off on a Noel Coward play:

"Reginald!"

"Cynthia!"

"Back?"

"Yes,"

"So soon?"

"Yes—Cynthia, we must talk."

"I know."

"You mean . . ."

"Quite."

"I'm leaving."

"Oh, so. Pamela?"

"No."

"Evelyn?"

"No."

"Cec-ily?"

"Pre-cisely."

"Ooh, tonight?"

"Tonight."

"I see."

"I'm glad. Hmmm, and you?"

"I'm off, too."

"Oh."

"So."

"Algy?"

"No."

"Jerry?"

"No."

"Leslie?"

"Precisely."

". . . Well, cheerio." (Music begins)

"Cynthia, our tune."

"Oh, love me?"

"Terribly."

"Want me?"

"Frightfully."

"Marry me?"

"Instantly,"

"Oh, Reggie, you've been a brick through the whole ugly mess."

(They go into a typical Coward love song)

Whether an artist is a blues shouter like the late Chippie Hill, or a polished hillbilly like Park Avenue's Dorothy Shay, it is easy to measure his comedy appeal. No one has found fault with Alec Templeton's satires on the opera, band concerts, or recitals. Alec is a blind pianist, but he can see the spirit of a musical laugh quite clearly. Will Mahoney always gives you a good laugh, too. A tap dancer and musician who has entertained throughout the world, he is probably best of all a storyteller. Will has the rare ability of being able to tell stories in many dialects, and for this reason he has transcended nationality and has been accepted in all countries.

The indefatigable Spike Jones's music couldn't arouse more yaks than this commentary on the Jones gang recording a platter:

"I raise my baton and give the downbeat. The band springs into action! George Rock pulls a mustard plaster off Doodles Weaver's chest. Doodles screams!!!! This wakes up the drummer, Joe Siracusa, who falls off his chair and rolls into Dick Morgan, knocking his guitar out of his hand. The guitar falls on Joe Colvin's foot, making him jump up and down. As he jumps, his trombone tickles Freddy Morgan, who starts to laugh. Dick Gardner hears the laughter and thinks he has said something funny, so he bows, knocking over Roger Donley's tuba and spilling the tea Roger has been boiling in the horn. Helen Grayco, our vocalist, sees the water and thinks the tide is coming in, so she dons a French bathing suit. Professor Birdbath sees her and whistles! This causes a robin to lay an egg on the G string of the piano. This gives us our first note and we continue from there."

THE GUYS BEHIND THE GAGS

Long live Joe Miller!

Every joke ever written eventually gets back to a guy called Joe Miller. Was there ever really a Joe Miller, mastermind of wit and humor?

These are the facts: Yes, Joe Miller lived—not as well as the comics today—but he was physically there. One Joe Miller made his debut in London at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1715—and that's no typo!

His jests weren't published until 1739, a year or so after his death. But since then his old joke book has been a comedy bible to vaudeville clowns and radio comics, not to mention night-club emcees. You said jokes were old, did you? What an understatement!

The first edition contained some 247 original anecdotes and sayings. In later editions the number increased to over 1,500. As the years passed, every jest—past, present, and future—was traced to Miller's authorship. If there ever was an immortal work—surely Joe Miller's is one.

Publications like *Variety*, the bible of show business, are continually pointing out to the writers and purveyors of comedy that there is need for clean and unoffensive material.

Recently Gerald F. Conway, Director of Public Relations at the Radisson Hotel, Minneapolis, Minnesota, sent a letter to *Variety* editor Abel Green pointing out that with the entertainment business off all over the country it might be good for operators and entertainers to rebuild their material and blue-pencil the shady cracks.

Green has pointed out that comedians persist in being the worst offenders against racial minorities. This is not because comedians are biased, but because so many are thoughtless of consequences. Anything for a giggle. Moreover, a comedian's habit of thinking exclusively in terms of gags, his long conditioning to "Hebe," "Tad," and "Darkie" stock-in-trade, often make him unwilling to admit when challenged that much of what used to be innocent fun is now vicious propaganda. Hence, when attention has been called from time to time to examples of dubious racial humor, a tendency has been observed among comedians which is not encouraging. They do not acknowledge the offense, protest good intention, or indicate a disposition to watch more carefully in the future. Instead they counterattack.

On an average, an offensive routine or joke important enough to attract *Variety's* attention is reported every week. It's bad stuff. It's bad for show business and show people, who, more than the average, need to be understanding, need to set an enlightened example. Too many comedians, announcers, slaphappy emcees are hurting the good cause.

At one time, not too many years ago, Walter Winchell campaigned against the dialecticians' type of comedy. He pointed out, quite rightly, that many of the dialect stories used by comics were offensive to the races, colors, and creeds lampooned. Basically, Winchell was not against a particular way of speaking when it was for characterization as such, as in the case of Molly Goldberg, mother of the Goldbergs of radio and film, who speaks in her broken English-Yiddish accent. What Winchell did cry out against was the type of depiction where the Irishman with his rich brogue was always a dumb traffic cop, or the little Jewish character was always the miser. This kind of racial representation, Winchell felt, was unjust, because untrue.

However, WW never found fault with such performers as George Givot, the Greek ambassador of Good Will, Jack Pearl, the Baron Munchausen, and Eddie Anderson (Rochester of Jack Benny's show), who specializes in being a foil for his boss, or even Eddie Green, the waiter on Duffy's Tavern. Shirley Booth, who for a long time was the boss's daughter on Duffy's Tavern, portrayed a funny Brooklynese character to perfection. And, of course, Kenny Delmar, who for years portrayed the Senator of the Southern drawl on the Fred Allen show, can also be excused from WW's classification of undesirable dialecticians, as can the other inhabitants of Allen's Alley, including Ajax Cassidy and Mrs. Nussbaum. These people made no one mad. They only make people laugh.

A borderline case, however, is the New Yiddish comic, Myron Cohen. Some who know the garment center and the characters he depicts so well, find much folly in his portrayals. One of his very famous stories, for instance, is about two partners in the dress manufacturing business. One is a salesman and the other a manufacturer. Their experiences are typical of any other business where two men become rich before they can blink twice and haven't had time to think how best to spend their financial accumulation. Therefore, their expenditures are like the old W. C. Fields picture where Fields inherited a million and didn't know what to do with it.

Cohen's audiences, oddly, have been people from garment center areas largely, and if he were unwanted as a comic, they might certainly have been expected to give him the boot long ago. As it is, they pay him \$1,500 to \$3,000 a week for his story-telling.

Tom Howard claims that, like a cat, every joke has nine lives. You can beat the living daylights out of it in 1930, only to turn around in 1950 and find it grinning at you. Then you make certain of its demise by repeating it to death. But let there be an internal change of some sort, physical or mental, in the country and lo and behold! there is that joke again—maybe wearing a different suit of clothes, but underneath, the same gag.

We've had Ford jokes, farm jokes, prohibition jokes, Coolidge jokes—but remove the veneer and you'll find them all brothers under the skin. And without the aid of a plastic surgeon, either.

World War II gave us the very gags which were a howl during the first war to end all wars. Prettied up a little here, spruced up a little there, to be sure, if you want to get technical. But put them under the X-ray and they're all alike.

Let's take the Helena gag, a 1918 favorite. Any comedian worth his salt then was certain to include the routine in which he asked his uniformed stooge: "Tell me, when you were training over here, did you touch Helena?" "No," was the crackerjack retort, "but I got next to Sadie!" Today they're telling it this way: The comic asks his straightman, "What's this I hear about your returning from Italy?" "Yep," is the response, "just got back." "While in Italy," was the next question, "did you touch Florence?" "Nope," was the answer, "but I borrowed ten bucks from Lulu!"

Then there's the one of horseless-carriage vintage: the Ford which knocked its owner down. A neighbor hearing of this remarked: "First time I ever did hear tell of a motor car with its own mind." Today it has come to life but with this twist: A man was complaining that his electric razor always cut him. A heckler commented: "It's the first time I ever heard of a razor with an opinion." Ten will get you one that twenty years from now you'll be hearing the same gag with a helicopter background.

One thing is certain: American humor for the next decade will have a geographical basis never before attained. Gag men have been around a bit, Iceland, Trinidad, Australia, China, and a score of other places. You can be pretty certain they'll come up with their own particular geographical twist.

The "dream school," the Gagwriters Institute, is an academy that includes in its curriculum visits to night clubs, musicomedies, and even burlesque shows.

Thereby the National Laugh Foundation, sponsors of the school, seeks to develop and discover new gagwriters for every medium of entertainment. The school serves as a comedy clinic, bringing together professionals and amateurs, both as performers and writers. Special projects test the mettle of "students," and assignments often result in compensation for the active participants.

Admittance to its forty-four-week, Wednesday night course in Manhattan is confined to young creative humorists. A sample script—prose, poetry, dialogue, gags, or anything in the fun field—is a requisite for entrance. The class is confined to the fifty top applicants, assuring high-level contributions from the students. Writers, comedians, and others interested are welcome, and may attend one session as guest observers.

The Gagwriters Institute, the only school in the nation which teaches laugh-making, held an annual Graduation Exercise at Palisades, New Jersey. Top comics of night clubs, stage, screen, and radio, and the creative men behind the gags, received Honorary Doctorates for their contributions to the Laugh History of the Nation.

Among the recipients of the degrees were Eddie Mayehoff, Pioneer Television Comic; Smith and Dale, for Fifty Years of Fun-Making; Happy Felton, for Quiz-Mastery; and Phil Kramer and Arnold Stang, "Doctors of Stooage-ry."

Many other comics have been invited to serve as guest speakers, including Milton Berle, Phil Foster, Robert Q. Lewis, Henny Youngman, Jan Murray, Henry Morgan, Joe Laurie, Jr., Goodman Ace, Nat Hiken, Lester Gottlieb (CBS comedy producer), Sid Reznick, Louis Quinn, Harry Herman, and Herb Moss.

Serving as comedy consultants for the school are Art Henley, author of *Radio Comedy: How to Write It* and writer for "Honeymoon in New York," the Peter Donald Show, and many others; and Charlie Sherman, who wrote sketches for the Ziegfeld "Follies" and the Jack Pearl stage review, a veteran of twenty years on the Broadway scene.

A wacky part of the services offered by the foundation is a weekly humor-clinic workshop. Enrollment is around five hundred, with at least fifty regulars. These humor boys and girls meet in a hall to criticize, condone, and generally get each other in stitches. They are trying to crack the Iron Curtain which keeps new talent from being discovered. With the present credit system existing in radio, it has become, they say, a lot more important what a writer *has* done than what he *can* do. Therefore, it is prac-

tically impossible for new talent to get a comedian, sponsor, network, or agency to look at novice scripts.

The weekly clinic brings professionals and amateurs together, presents guest lecturers, and assigns to the deserving special projects which sometimes result in placement. The collaboration of those on the inside with the kids trying to scale the wall often turns the trick.

There is no charge for these weekly soirees, other than a twenty-five-cent donation per session to pay rent on the meeting hall. Four- or five-minute pieces are read aloud and criticized, and occasionally an entire period is given over to the reading of a show. Students also report and analyze broadcasts they have visited. Milton Berle, Bob Hope, the Answer Man, and the Willie Piper Show have all hired writers from this school, and Charlie Sherman has taken two kids to apprentice. One young hopeful now sells his gags regularly to top-notch cartoonists.

There are probably few other fields in which it is possible to go so quickly from rags to riches. This keeps bringing newcomers into the business. A top gagster can make \$2,500 a week! He will probably start at \$50, working for another writer, and progress to \$250. But if he hits the top he'll really ring the bell. "Of course every one of them thinks he's better than the top man. I wouldn't have them around if they didn't feel like this," Foundation Director George Lewis remarked. "A guy's gotta have plenty of ego in this business to get anywhere."

A former press agent, Lewis wrote gags for columns and worked for Mutual Broadcasting System before starting the Foundation. In those days he believed it was who you knew, not what you could do. Now he thinks it is both, plus luck. All sorts of people come to his clinic. One boy travels ninety miles every week. A psychiatrist comes to sit and observe. He's writing his thesis on what makes funnymen tick, and he finds ample material at the school, where jokes are pulled out of thin air like rabbits from a magician's hat, and classmates oftener than not act out each other's brain children.

In the beginning, the Foundation hoped to get a law passed

in Congress to protect gags. They found, however, that it was impossible to copyright anything under fifty words. Lewis still thinks there should be some way to protect these comic writers and the association is continuing work on the project.

Other features include the establishment of a Humor Hall of Fame to immortalize the great and distinguished humorists and comedians of American history. They plan to help raise funds for worthy laugh projects, to develop a World Laugh Center, a central organization which can channel all research on humor and comedy into the proper fields, and they want to offer prizes and competitions to inspire new humorists and provide a showcase for young writers and new comedians.

Besides all of these activities, Lewis finds time to edit the trade journal in the comedy field, *Comedy World*. This nationally circulated magazine gives market tips, brings helpful articles by top comedians to future gagwriters, and lists personalities in the field with biographies and current addresses. On its masthead it boasts of having such key men as Milton Berle, Henny Youngman, and Alan Young as comedy consultants. The publisher is Dick Randall, who formerly was at the helm of such publications as *Broadway Reporter* and *Cartoon News*.

Comedy World points out to the members of the industry such items as "Laugh Starvation Faces Nation," "Gags Sag as Wags Lag," and it stresses constantly that new faces, new material, and new outlets are needed for comedy. It keeps the comedy industry from complacency.

There's a new trend in literary circles—pioneered by Earl Wilson, author of the best-sellers *Pike's Peek or Bust* and *Let 'em Eat Cheesecake*—a trend based on the very sound assumption that an author, familiar with his product, is in a better position to review his book than is a disinterested critic. To continue in the Wilson tradition we turn to Joey Adams, the distinguished George Bernard Shaw of Brownsville, whose book *From Gags to Riches* caused conversation in illiterary circles from Coast to Coast, and whose radio program "Rate Your Mate" has swept into the position of a national favorite. Adams says:

"The forewords in *From Gags to Riches* are by the late Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia—Earl Wilson (The Bust) columnist in America—Gypsy Rose Lee (and without a cover charge)—Toots Shor (The Crum-bum who will pay anything but a compliment)—and Frank Sinatra (who was born with a golden croon in his mouth and went overseas to show the people over in Europe that we can starve too).

"There are eighty cartoons in *From Gags to Riches* by twenty-three of the most famous cartoonists in America, including Al Capp, Ham Fisher, Russell Patterson, etc. In between cartoons and forewords, they let me sneak in the story of a comic's life (if you can call that living).

"Would I lie to you? It's a great book. Now that I finished writing it, Earl suggests that I learn to read. Henny Youngman says he can see it on sale in those bargain stores with a torn cover and a sign, 'On Sale—9c' . . .

"So many actors have put out books—Joe E. Lewis says he is a celebrity because he didn't write a book!

"I was worried about the reviews of the other writers and told Tony Canzoneri and Mark Plant about it—once when I got bad reviews on the stage and told LaGuardia about it, he said 'Don't worry, son—critics are like parrots—they always repeat what everybody else is saying.'

"I don't claim to be an original wit—after all—an original wit on Broadway is a guy who sees it in the columns before you do—but I did try to tell the story of The Hangouts (Broadway Foxholes)—The Dumb Belle and Beautifools—the Fourteen Characters—the wits, and most of all, the laughs on the Great Witty Way. Also 'I Gaze Into My Hate Ball' long enough to discuss the famous feuds of the double-crossroads of the world. Also, the critics who were born with Silver Knives in their mouths—everything that makes up show business that I know and love. So how come I can't get a job?

"*From Gags to Riches*" is in its twenty-first printing. That is, they printed twenty-one books. Anyway, I got the gags (so what if I took them from the great wits of all time)—now all I need is the riches.

"Anybody who reads this column can receive a copy of my book—all he has to do is present my column to his local book-seller and he will receive free of charge—an autographed copy of my worst seller *From Gags to Riches*—there will be a slight tax of \$2.50 per copy—to pay for my publishers's new home and swimming pool.

"I don't claim to be Shakespeare—you will be the first to recognize that—but I do have a sharp pencil and scissors and I did record the funniest stories and gags that have been bandied about by people of show business.

"As far as the actual writing of the book, even experts can't tell the difference between Damon Runyon and myself—until they start to read it.

"At least the cover of the book is good—it matches my suit.

"It wasn't easy writing the book between five and six shows every day. At times I encountered more troubles than a radio serial. But I did have fun writing about the laughs in our business.

"As Joe E. Lewis would say—I'm working under a handicap—I have no talent—maybe I'm better off if you don't like it—success has made failures of many men—and I promise not to let failure go to my head."

On one of the back pages of *Comedy World* was probably the sharpest advice ever forwarded to comedians—or to anyone who likes to tell a story, for that matter. Our good friend Art Henley, author of the book *Radio Comedy—How to Write it*, gives five rules for gagwriting:

1. BE BRIEF . . . use as few words as possible.
2. BE CLEAR . . . make your words simple and your sentences short.
3. BE DIRECT . . . progress from straight line to punch line quickly, dynamically.
4. BE NATURAL . . . write for easy reading, whether aloud or in silence.
5. BE FUNNY . . . save the snapper for the very end.

Radio humor has remained simple. Few comedians used a sophisticated approach. Henry Morgan tried it. It worked in Metropolitan New York, but when he tried to play it coast to coast he had to change his style and add stooges, gagwriters, and a comedy band—then still couldn't score with it.

Here are some samples of gags used on popular and semi-popular programs during and after the war years. Note the simplicity, the casualness, the unsophisticated air.

Jimmy Durante, reporting on an Alaskan trip, told Garry Moore he saw a sign outside an igloo which read: "Eskimo Spitz Dogs—Five Dollars Apiece."

"Well, what's so unusual about that?" asked Garry.

"Unusual!" exclaimed Jimmy. "I got fifty dollars that says the Eskimo can't do it!" ("Moore-Durante Show.")

A teacher told her class to write an essay on income tax. So little Oscar taxes his brain but nothing happened so he wrote, I have a dog. His name is Tax. I open the door and In-Come-Tax! ("Can You Top This?")

CHARLES LAUGHTON: I'm a famous philanthropist. Don't tell me you've never heard of the Laughton Foundation.

CHARLIE MCCARTHY: Well, no. But I always figured you wore one. ("Chase and Sanborn Show.")

Old-timers were talking. "I've got rheumatism in my left leg," said the first. "That's old age," advised the friend. "Couldn't be," said the afflicted, "my right leg is as old as my left and I ain't got rheumatism in that one." ("Can You Top This?")

BOB HOPE: Of course I was friendly with General Dwight Eisenhower. I call him by his nickname, Ike.

CARPENTER: What did he call you?

BOB HOPE: Well, during the heat of battle, everybody gets excited. ("Bing Crosby Music Hall.")

Social tact is making your guests feel at home, even though you wish they were there. (*Radio Reader's Digest.*)

JIMMY DURANTE: I was takin' a dip in the surf when all of a sudden a swordfish swam up to me. He took one look at my schnozz and said, "I quit. You've got a superior weapon." ("Durante-Moore Show.")

BABY SNOOKS: Remember I asked you, "What's the shape of the world?"

DADDY: Yes.

BABY SNOOKS: Well, teacher said "Stinko" ain't the right answer. ("Maxwell House Coffee Time.")

ED GARDNER: Well, Miss Ball, you haven't said how you like the place.

LUCILLE BALL: Oh yes, I have, under my breath.

ED GARDNER: Well, let's hear it, we like to have a lady's comment.

LUCILLE BALL: This isn't a lady's comment. ("Duffy's Tavern.")

EDDIE CANTOR: One look at you, and I feel like a different man.

IDA LUPINO: One look at you, and *I* feel like a different man. ("Eddie Cantor Show.")

MILTON BERLE: In Washington, it's so crowded cops paint lines down the pedestrians to protect the taxis. Honestly, the only way to get a cab there is to buy one. I waited an hour but the only Cab I saw was Calloway. ("Full Speed Ahead.")

GEORGE: Look, I've got a surprise for you, dear—I brought Eddie Cantor home for dinner.

GRACIE: Oh, George, we couldn't eat an old friend. ("Burns and Allen.")

MILTON BERLE: You sound like you'd make a great comedian, Chico.

CHICO MARX: Not me, but I've got a cousin who is a comedian. He was on radio ten years before they found out he was crazy.

MILTON: Did they take him off?

CHICO: No, by that time he was too famous. ("Let Yourself Go.")

BERT LYTELL: Well, whatever made you decide to do Shakespeare, José?

JOSE FERRER: The first time I saw the Dodgers play.

BERT LYTELL: And from watching the Dodgers play you got an idea to do Shakespeare, José?

JOSE FERRER: Yes—the Comedy of Errors. ("Stage Door Canteen.")

ISH KABBIBLE: You know, Lady Godiva was the first woman jockey.

PHIL HARRIS: Did she win?

ISH KABBIBLE: No, but she certainly showed. ("Kollege of Musical Knowledge.")

RAYMOND RADCLIFFE: I studied law at night school but I flunked out.

RANSOM SHERMAN: Flunked out of night school? What happened?

RAYMOND RADCLIFFE: I couldn't read in the dark. ("Nit Wit Court.")

LULU MC CONNELL: I'm getting a divorce from my old man. He insulted me. You know what he said to me? He told me this morning that my stockings were all wrinkled.

TOM HOWARD: Well, what makes you think that's an insult?

LULU MC CONNELL: I didn't have my stockings on. ("It Pays to Be Ignorant.")

Mr. Smith called up Dr. Jones and asked him to come over to his house right away, as his wife had appendicitis. "Aha, don't worry about it," the doctor said, "there's no need to worry, I operated on your wife three years ago. I took out her appendix and I never heard of anybody having two." "You didn't?" asked Mr. Smith. "Didn't you ever hear of anybody having two wives?" ("Can You Top This?")

Six-year-old Charlie asked his father one day what a sweater girl was. The father thought for a minute, then he tried to make a diplomatic answer. "Well, Charles, a sweater girl is a girl who works in a factory making sweaters." Then the father got to thinking, and he asked, "Charles, where did you get that question?" Charles said, "The heck with the question—where did you get that answer?" ("Thanks to the Yanks.")

The judge said, "Mr. Stebbins, I'm granting you a divorce, and I'm going to give your wife thirty-five dollars a week." So Artie said, "That's mighty nice of you, Judge, and I'll try to slip her a buck now and then myself." ("Abbott and Costello.")

If a girl refuses to visit a man's apartment it means she has already been etch-u-cated. ("Listen to Lewis.")

A boss is the man at the office who is early when you're late and late when you're early. ("Take It or Leave It.")

Looking in *Esquire* to see what the men are wearing is like going to a burlesque show to look at the ushers. ("The Eddie Cantor Show.")

...And now that you know what makes for a good quip, let me introduce you to one of the better writers for radio comedy, Glen Wheaton.

All topics are grist for Wheaton's sharp-edged parodies—Jimmy Durante's nose, Bob Hope's beak too; Crosby's balding pate, not to mention Crosby's loud shirts and lagging race horses. Wheaton maintained that the parodies did not come to him in a surge of inspiration over the morning grapefruit juice, in the shower, or over lunch at Hollywood's Brown Derby.

"I get most of my ideas from my old typewriter," he said. "It's stood by me a lot of years."

Wheaton hailed originally from Wisconsin, but then moved over to Minnesota to attend that state's university because he was offered a job there through respect for his basketball-playing ability. He had a hankering for radio, however, and later went west to San Francisco where he started writing radio shows in connection

with the World's Fair. He was knocking out from fifteen to twenty shows a week because he "didn't know any better." But Wheaton found out—"I think somebody from the union told me"—and decided then to concentrate his efforts. "Command Performance" was his baby and he launched it in March, 1942. When the show was taken over by the Armed Forces Radio Service, Mann Holiner, now vice-president of the Lennen and Mitchell advertising agency and producer of the Sinatra show, became producer of "Command Performance," and under his expert guidance the show established new heights in quality of overseas radio entertainment, and, in fact, adopted a standard for quantity and quality of "big name" entertainment which rarely has been equaled in domestic commercial broadcasts.

A typical Wheaton parody was one which Sinatra and Jack Carson presented in duet. Sung to the tune of "Don't Bring Lulu" (and naturally, reading it can hardly do it justice), it went like this:

Oh, I'll bring Van, that freckle faced man,
But don't bring Crosby;
I'll bring Hope with a nose like a rope,
But don't bring Crosby.
Pork pie hat on top his fuzz,
Not as much fuzz as there used to was;
When he wears those shorts to town,
Window shades come a-tumbling down.
Some can come, and Carson, that bum,
But don't bring Crosby.
I'm tellin' you that boo, boo, boo, boo
Has to say upon the shelf;
He came to town on the box cars,
Now look at all his Oscars;
Don't bring Crosby, don't bring Crosby
I'll bring him myself.

Columnists, editorial writers, cartoonists, even prominent businessmen and statesmen get their gags from the country's leading press agents. Not the Public Relations boys who watch over

the labor-management problems of industry, but the guys around Broadway who one day are publicizing a singer, the next day a dancing-school impresario, the next, a used-car salesman, and so on.

These unsung heroes of the comedy world knock out what little brains they have trying to get just the right thing for Walter Winchell, Drew Pearson, Ed Sullivan, Louis Sobol, Dan Walker, Earl Wilson, and Leonard Lyons. They try and try again. Sooner or later they score, and their client is saying the funniest thing printable that day. Lately, Earl Wilson has filled up a whole pillar of his widely syndicated column with gags from leading press agents.

Don't take me literally when I talk about lack of brains in this fraternity. There are more college degrees kicking around in this field than in any other on Broadway. Such men as Len Golos, responsible for a lot of the humor that came forth from the old 18 Club on Fifty-second Street; Harry Sobol (a brother of columnist Louis Sobol), who should know what the columnists want, and does; George Lewis, Ted Howard, Seaman Jacobs; these are but a few. However, Golos and Sobol, I believe, are the masters of the art. They have been using it as a pry bar to gain publicity for their clients for the past twenty years and are good for another twenty in their league.

Sometimes a wily press agent will miss his well-directed mark. There's probably no more famous incident of a stunt backfiring than the one Olsen and Johnson's man tried to pull. It happened this way: the agent had lined up a "wonderful stunt, boys," and just when the crowd was heaviest outside the opening of "Hellzapoppin'," the agent had cameramen on hand to take a shot of the two comics tossing lemon meringue pies at each other. When the cue was given to let fly with the pie, Olsen and Johnson took good aim and let the press agent have it, right in the face!

Probably the poorest publicized of all comedy groups, in contrast to Olsen and Johnson, is the lovable, laughable circus clown, who has no one to plan pie tricks for him. The one who's received the most notice is Emmett Kelly, who does a pantomimic tramp clown act. Lou Jacobs of the arched eyebrow set, Felix Adler with his baby pig and nursing bottle, and Paul Jung of the big nose and wide smile school are the other leaders under the big top.

Publicity through the years has made the Eddie Foys, the Irvin S. Cobbs, and even a Chaz Chase. He is not discovered who does not have the right type of press agent. Danny Kaye could still be working the night-club circuit if it hadn't been for the acclaim engineered by his press agent, who later became his manager, Ed Dukoff. The great Bob Hope has had publicist Mac Millar by his side for almost fifteen years. And even the Schnozz doesn't forget Clayton and Jackson, his former partners, who are still his best press agents.

The author finds that he can hardly send a book to press without a comment on the genial Jack Egan. Jack's been around Broadway and your own main street for about twenty years now. His Christmas cards usually are a self-laugh at Egan's unusually untrimmed pate. (Well, all right, there is a fringe on the edge). Jack's father was the famous minstrel man, Billy Egan, who operated out of Yonkers, and is reputed to have given Morton Downey his start. Billy was quite a collector of jokebooks and minstrel pieces—which have been passed down to Jack and have aided his efforts in supplying columnists with daily quips about his clients, who have included Dennis Day, Gene Krupa, Spike Jones, and Jerry Gray. Jack has publicized everything from a cookbook to a circus band, and what he doesn't know about musicians and their clan wouldn't fill a shot glass at Charley's Tavern, his nocturnal headquarters.

Len Golos, another main-streeter like Egan, has been contributing humor to the Broadway scene for many years. In the days when he publicized the famous Jack White's Club 18, much of the material that originated with White and the other comics and found its way into the daily newspapers was from the pen of Len.

Someday somebody's going to go behind that dirty little piled-up work desk where the press agent sits and beats his brains out, and bring the long-suffering little guy who's behind the gag out front for his due recognition.

Here are some gags and witticisms picked at random, that were ostensibly uttered by the personalities mentioned with the quip. Some are dated. Some are new. And some are even from

the second volume of Joe Miller—before he changed his name to Bennett Cerf.

Lovely June Knight sagely observes: “A smart girl never cheats a man, and a bear trap never chases a bear—but the results are always the same.”

Gene Leone observes keenly that all the cocktail parties he has ever gone to have been terribly crowded, but there always seems to be room for one bore.

Meyer Davis describes a much-married actress: “She doesn’t think of men all the time, but when she thinks, she thinks of men.”

Actress Gale Storm reports this sign in a fashion shop: “Our gowns are authentic Southern style—show enough!”

June Allyson swears it happened on a trip to New York:

Three well-oiled gentlemen boarded one of those double-decked Fifth Avenue buses, and seated themselves in the lower deck.

“’S too stuffy down here,” one of them finally gasped, “I’m going upshtairsh.”

He stumbled to the upper deck only to return in a few minutes.

“’S not safe up there,” he solemnly informed his companions, “no drivers.”

Paul Winchell offers the new version of the monkey gag. It seems that every nation started throwing atom bombs and everybody in the world was wiped out except two monkeys—a male and a female. The male looked at his companion and said in disgust, “Don’t tell me we have to start this thing all over again.”

Romo Vincent reports this conversation between two watches: “Remember we must tick together!”

“Latest aviation enthusiast,” reports writer Lou Grossman, “is a local corset manufacturer who has ambitions to girdle the globe.”

Louis Prima was caught in one of those celebrity surveys in which a fan magazine asked how a man should select a wife. Replied Louis: "I have found that a man usually picks his wife the same way that a lamb picks its butcher!" Louis continued with these words of wisdom: "Call a woman a kitten, not a cat. Call her a mouse, not a rat. She's a chicken, not a hen—and a duck, but not a goose. And remember—she's a vision, not a sight."

Spike Jones, the zany maestro, tells about the irate wife of a movie star who had gone off fishing and left her alone. Asked where her husband might be, the wife replied that he had gone fishing. "Just walk down to the bridge," she suggested, "and look around until you find a pole with a worm on each end."

Lois Andrews writes from the Coast that you can tell when a person has acquired that certain Hollywood polish—he always starts casting reflections on everybody else.

A song-plugger brought a new tune to singer Jane Harvey, who, upon listening, made a bow every minute. The plugger finally asked Jane if anything was wrong with her back. "No," explained Miss Harvey, "but I do have a habit of bowing whenever I meet an old acquaintance and there are so many I remember in your tune."

Soprano Victoria Schools knows what's happened to the man who sold refrigerators to Eskimos. He's now selling garters to bobby-soxers.

Ann Andre knows a comedian whose seven-year-old son came home with his report card. "Well, son," said the comedian, "did you get promoted?" "I did better than that, Pop," was the reply, "I was held over for another twenty-six weeks."

Elmer Leterman tells the story of the two Arabs, one of whom wanted to borrow a rope from the other. "I can't lend it to you," said the other, "I need it to tie around my head while I sleep." "Who," said the would-be borrower, "ever heard of anyone tying a rope around his head at night?" "My friend," said the other, "when you don't want to lend something, one excuse is as good as another."

Steve Broidy, president of Monogram Pictures, was in a group at Ciro's when the talk turned to dictators and aggressors. "Whenever they invade a helpless country," said Barry Sullivan, "they claim it was absolutely necessary." "Yes," put in Broidy, "necessity is the mother of intervention."

It's David Terry's story of the Congressman who was arrested for speeding. When he came up before the judge he immediately spoke up: "I admit I may have been speeding a little, Judge," he said, "but you see, I'm a Congressman—"

"Ignorance is no excuse," said the judge promptly.

It's Art Mooney's tale of the two elderly ladies who met after a long time. "And how is your daughter?" asked one. "My daughter," was the answer, "made a wonderful marriage to a very rich man. She gets up at eleven o'clock, has breakfast in bed, plays bridge all afternoon, eats in the finest restaurants, goes to the shows and all the night clubs." "Why, that's fine," said her friend, "and how about your son?" "Oh, him," said the matron, "he made a terrible mistake—married a real tramp. All she wants to do is sleep to eleven, have breakfast in bed, play bridge all afternoon, eat in the best restaurants, go to the shows and all the night clubs!"

Here's the favorite after-dinner joke of a top English production chief.

Three old men were discussing the ideal way of leaving this world. First, aged 75, said he would like to crash in a car traveling at 80 m.p.h. and go out quickly. Second, aged 85, thought this showed little imagination, declaring he'd like to take off in a jet-propelled plane and crash at 400 m.p.h. into a hill.

"I've got a better idea," said the third, aged 95. "I'd like to be shot by a jealous husband."

Two chorines were discussing their love lives. "Is it true, what they're saying?" asked one. "That you're going to divorce your husband?"

"Don't be silly," was the prompt answer. "Why, I hardly know him."

Georgia Auld overheard an actress who was just married being

congratulated by her friends. "You're going to be very happy," they gushed. "Of course," was the retort, "Ralph simply adores me—and so do I!"

Previously we showed you that much has been done for comedy during the past few years by the National Laugh Week Foundation and its founder, George Lewis.

In the April 1949 issue of his *Comedy World* the following comments on National Laugh Week were made by Fred Pitzer, co-founder along with Fred Benham of the distinguished club, the Circus Saints and Sinners:

"Laughter is a faculty which all of us possess, but use too little. That we do not exercise it more frequently adds more to the somberness of the world. To realize the danger of never laughing we need only to think back to Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo. They never laughed and consequently knew only cruelty. Titus proclaimed a day without laughter was a day lost. The pilgrims at Mecca consider it so essential a part of their devotion, that they call upon their prophet to preserve them from sad faces.

"'Thank God!' proclaimed Rabelais, with an honest pride, as his friends were weeping around his deathbed; 'If I were to die ten times over, I should never make you cry half so much as I have made you laugh.'

"It is pleasant to observe how laughter penetrates through the coldness and awkwardness of society, gradually bringing folks closer together, giving everyone a glad heart and a shining countenance.

"Genuine laughter is surely the flavor of the mind. It empties the soul of sunshine. It spreads good will so that others might enjoy its warmth.

"Both Charles Lamb and Ben Franklin take credit for the line, 'A laugh is worthy of a hundred groans in any market.' And we might add that laughter is one of the freedoms with which the government cannot tamper. It belongs to us and to us alone to give out and thus brighten an otherwise drab world. There is laughter pent up in all of us, and, fortunately, the National Laugh

Foundation has set aside one week beginning April 1 for its release. As Ella Wilcox so aptly wrote, 'Laugh and the world laughs with you.'

"There are many things happening here and abroad which cause us to groan, but let us use these seven days in an effort to laugh them off.

"Laugh and cause laughter; be joyful, be happy, be glad. Let our beams of laughter reflect cheerfulness wherever we might happen to be.

"Almost every philosopher from Diogenes to more modern men have evaluated laughter. 'Laugh and grow fat.' 'Laugh and be wise.' 'Laughter makes good blood.' You find this sort of proverb among all nations. Laughter has the same definition in every country.

"True, we cannot all be gifted with a sense of humor; that is a mental process with which a person must be born. But all of us possess those faculties of which laughter is made. It is up to us to put those faculties into use for at least one week of every year."

The Humor Hall of Fame was established to immortalize the distinguished funnymen who have been responsible for giving this nation its seventh sense—the Sense of Humor.

After a long, exhaustive, and extensive poll of over a thousand editors and theatrical historians, gagwriters, and publicists, eleven great comedians and humorists have been elected to the Hall of Fame.

Twenty-two women and 146 men were nominated. The elected personalities, all men, listed alphabetically, are: Fred Allen, Jack Benny, Robert Benchley, Charlie Chaplin, Jimmy Durante, W. C. Fields, the Marx Brothers, Will Rogers, Damon Runyon, James Thurber, and Mark Twain.

How did these men come to be funny?—they all began early. They knew humor; it was their business; and ironically, the work entailed to make people laugh is some of the hardest work you'll find on earth.



12



ANYTHING FOR A LAUGH

No, vaudeville never died. It was anything for a laugh and the variety stage moved right into night spots, both plush and humble. In the middle twenties, some of the greatest American comics were being educated in these spots and even the heckler in the box was moved into the night clubs—to become a waiter, a drummer, or the straight-man in the comedy act.

It was during this period that Jack White, the one and the only, was playing at the Chateau Madrid with Dan Healy, the “Night Mayor of Broadway.” White’s contribution to today’s comedy is significant. He was then a wit’s wit—and challenged the spontaneity of a host of better-known comics than himself.

White had just the right routine for night clubs—plenty of off-color and a trigger-type delivery. He muffed some of his lines one night and was heckled by a young Irish drummer who had just come in from Cincinnati after washing out as a radio singer at one of the local stations. The heckler was Pat Harrington. He really did a job on White’s routine, and White had to admit that Harrington pulled some funny lines.

White was quick to realize that this was a good addition to his act. Around 1926 this was the act that got all the attention in New York. White was called on for special appearances, benefits, and even pictures. His sense of timing, and his “takes” were perfect.

A "take" in comedy is the registering of a simulated emotion such as surprise or anger at an observation or remark of a heckler. The most effective take is the delayed one. This gives the audience time to laugh at the observation and as soon as the laughter dies down a little, the "take" brings laughter up to a high pitch again.

A typical "sight take" was pulled by Harrington and White for many years. White played the part of Edgar Bergen and Harrington played Charlie McCarthy. In the middle of the act, White would clear his throat and the dummy, Harrington, would spit. The audience of course would howl. White would pull a "sight take" at the dummy doing something on his own. Then White would say:

"Charlie, if you're not a good boy, I'll put you back in the trunk."

"Please don't put me back in the trunk," was the dummy's reply.

"Why not? Are you going to behave?"

"No, the trunk stinks," was the sassy remark.

White had an ideal face for a take.

You can't imagine a Ronald Colman doing a take the same way a comedian can do one. The comedy man must look on the dull side. White had the looks that went with the act too.

Frankie Hyers was trouping the borscht circuit as a tap dancer with a very beautiful gal, Lila Gaines. Their routines were not too sharp and precisionlike, and Frank would kid during the numbers to cover up the rough spots. This was the same Frankie Hyers who later joined White as one of his enlarged troupe and held forth at the famous 18 Club on Fifty-second Street for so many years. And five years after Lila and Frankie broke up their act, they were reunited in comedy routines at the 18 Club.

It was a top-notch group White had assembled. Jackie Gleason was imported from the Queens Terrace, where he had been making a big success of things. He weighed about 275 pounds at the time of his first triumph. Jackie, a Hoboken, New Jersey, lad with a grand sense of humor, started as an emcee in the saloons out in Jersey. He has scored greatly in TV today.

Many comics who took their postgraduate courses with White

had originally started in show business as dancers, singers, or musicians. Vince Curran, for instance, was a singer. Roy Sedley, another popular comic of this era, was a dancer. Gordon Andrews was a piano player.

What really built the 18 Club was the heckling given to the customers. Some of the biggest names in show business and the comedy world were ripped up the back with the ad libs from White and his fast-moving verbal crew of punsters. They all took it on their comedy chins. Guys like Olsen and Johnson, Milton Berle, the Marx Brothers, the Ritz Brothers, Fred Allen, Ben Bernie, Jack Benny, Mischa Auer, and Frank Fay. These fellows would head into the 18 Club to match comedy wits with the Fifty-second Street crew.

Marie Wilson was accosted by White and Company one night. They had crossed the floor and stood before her table, gloating like hungry vultures about to descend on a handsome prey, while White made his oh-so-polite introduction about this great, beautiful star and, "How happy we are to have her with us tonight. Marie, would you say a few words?"

As Marie's companion, familiar with the 18 Club routine, whispered warnings not to dare open her mouth in acknowledgment or suffer she would, White, Harrington, and Hyers bowed and handed her the microphone, ready to pounce upon her first statement.

Marie graciously accepted the microphone, smiled at the three, then very matter-of-factly, said, "Don't drink your bathwater." She then handed the mike back to a dumbfounded Jack White.

The three fastest ad libbers in show business stood gaping at the blonde. Not one of them could think of a thing to say. After all, what in the world can a man say to a stupid remark like that? "Don't drink your bathwater"!

White could mow most of the big-time comics down with a few carefully chosen digs. He threw at Fred Allen one night, "It's time to quit, Fred, when you start to sound like Gracie."

Olsen and Johnson were in the audience one night and White with little thought gave out with "Olsen laughs at Johnson, John-

son laughs at Olsen, but nobody laughs at Olsen and Johnson."

During this period before the war, the Marx Brothers' pictures were banned in Italy. Groucho Marx went off to the men's room during the middle of White's show. White told the folks not to laugh at Groucho when he came back. Groucho came back wearing the toilet seat as a halo. The audience met him with silence. White gave with, "The poor Marx Brothers . . . over in Italy they can't laugh at them and over here they won't!"

Frank Fay was taking a lot of kidding and heckling from the crew one night and finally popped off with, "Why don't you fellows run away from home and go on the stage?" Hyers retorted, "Why don't you run away from the stage and go on home?"

Milton Berle, who likes to hog an act and tried it even when he ventured into the 18 Club, would be put in his place by Harrington with, "You went over with a lull, Milton."

To some personality of the sports or business world who had an inflated opinion of his own importance, White would say, "Please don't tell us your name, let us hate you incognito."

A great crack was tossed at Max Baer after he had been knocked out a second time by Lou Nova. "I didn't recognize you standing up, Maxie," said White.

Nelson Eddy one night had the courage to stand up on the floor and say he was going to sing a song from his last picture.

"I hope it was," was the Hyers quip.

Clark Gable was heckled with, "Since much of Gable's recent movie performance was on the cutting-room floor, he is now getting fan mail from mice." Harrington shouted, "He has more film on his teeth than in his last picture."

Jack Benny was squelched when he attempted to play the violin. As he broke into the opening strains of "Love in Bloom," White said, "My God, don't tell me that Joe Miller taught violin too."

There was one comedian who worked at the 18 Club for nothing. That guy was Joe Frisco. Joe had a set fee of \$1,500 per week. But if he wanted to appear at a club, he would work for nothing if he couldn't get that much. And he did.

Frisco has a natural type of humor. He is really a lot funnier

with a group of friends than he is when bound by a script or routine. Joe started his theatrical career by being a dancer. He went into comedy accidentally. Now he's a classic.

The most famous story told about Frisco is centered around Crosby. Frisco and Crosby were at the race track in Hollywood and Frisco had a tip on a 30-to-1 shot. He borrowed fifty dollars from Crosby to play the horse. The horse won the race and Frisco collected the shekels. The next Crosby saw of him was in the Turf Club with a couple of girls, drinking champagne. As Crosby approached, Joe peeled off the fifty dollars from a big bankroll of tens and twenties and with a straight face said, "Here, boy, sing us a couple of choruses of 'Stardust.'"

One time Frisco was asked how far it is from where he lives to where he works. "Just a mile and a furlong," answered Joe.

When there wasn't enough comedy coming from his well-paid comedians, Jack White would recruit Jackson from the men's room, or "Doc" Lee, the waiter who did a health routine, or Willie Grogan, the rotund waiter with a puddin' face. These three characters became the funniest stooges ever seen anywhere on any stage.

When Mr. and Mrs. Average Citizen walked into the 18 Club, something always happened to them. It was hard to explain. Something happened to even the most dignified pates.

White was also a great baseball fan. He was a Giant rooter and whenever the Giants lost he would post a sign stating "No Game Today." If they won, of course the score went up on the board.

Jerry Bergen, the pint-sized clown, was another comic who worked in the White act at the 18 Club.

They did anything for a laugh at this club. Even the plunger from the men's room was in the act. It was anything for a laugh with White and he didn't miss anything in those 18 Club days.

"A comedian without a prop can't click," says Wesley Ruggles. "I learned that back in the days when I pushed the props around for Charlie Chaplin. Great pantomimist that he is, Chaplin realizes the necessity of props. Just review some of the great Chaplin scenes. Charlie was either pushing a street cleaner's wagon,

or manipulating forks and two bread rolls in an unforgettable ballet. What were those baggy pants, derby hat, and cane? Props—nothing more or less.

“Although that was a good many years ago, the same holds true today. There is nothing new about comedy. In order to be funny, a comedian must feel at ease. He can’t worry about his hands, his feet, or where he’ll light while telling his jokes. Props take his mind off himself. They keep him natural.

“Another secret any well-seasoned comedian knows is that the funny thing is the familiar one. People laugh at what they understand. No matter how clever a joke, if it is too subtle for the audience, it falls flat.

“No one knew that better than Will Rogers. He depended on both props and everyday humor for his laughs. These are comedy fundamentals. Remember his rope and chewing gum? Will was never without either. In pictures, when he didn’t have his rope, he kept his hands in his pockets. But he always had his gum. Secondly, Will’s famous remark: ‘I only know what I read in the newspapers,’ was the other bulwark of his routines. He gave his inimitable comical twists to daily happenings—happenings that were fresh in the minds of the audience. And he got laughs.

“The Keystone Cops—I was one myself—availed themselves of the same things. First they got themselves entangled in common, homely mix-ups, then took to the kitchen, and a custard pie. It stood them in good stead for many a year.

“Now don’t get me wrong. Comedy isn’t throwing something or gagging newspaper headlines. Comedians must have a certain flair, a sense of timing; that is indispensable. Some come by it naturally, others develop it.

“Speaking of natural comedians reminds me of the time, a good many years ago, when I interviewed a group of kids for a college picture. Every once in a while, during that interview, I’d feel a sting on my neck. After a moment or two, I discovered that a fat young man, freckle-faced, was using a BB blower to excellent advantage. Annoyed as I was, I couldn’t help smiling at his face, his substantial outline, and the expert manner in which he was manipulating his weapon. Here, thought I, is a boy with a natural flair for comedy. He’s annoying me and making me like it. Also,

he knows how so use his prop. I signed that boy for the picture and a personal contract. That boy? Jack Oakie!

"Lana Turner, I believe, has this same natural bent for comedy. 'Slightly Dangerous' was her debut in this field. She has the knack of never overstressing her point or anticipating a laugh. An audience, no matter how receptive to comedy, would resent this. She also had been provided with plenty of props for the film—an entire soda fountain, no less. It brings to mind countless opportunities for fun.

"As soon as I think of props, I'm reminded of my favorite Chaplin story. After any one of his scenes, Charlie, who took his comedy seriously, would yell for a handkerchief—to mop his brow. I was the boy who always had one handy. He'd use it, then stuff it in his pocket. I'd never see it again. To this day, Chaplin owes me \$8.75, for two dozen handkerchiefs."

And that, my friends, is comedy. What makes a man funny? You've heard in this book all their opinions—the opinions of the great and humble (including my own). Only you, however, that individual who's so important in the audience, know. For you, the individual, the guy whose funny bone has to be tickled enough to make those muscles in your belly give with a laugh, you're the guy who'll say what's funny and what's not. You're the guy who'll tell the writers what to write, the publicity men what to circulate, the movies what to show, Hooper what to rate, and the funnyman what to say. You are the guy to say where comedy is going. For as long as people need to laugh, you'll be in there telling the comedian to go on with the show.

Chic Johnson and Ole Olsen were presented to Pope Pius last year with these words:

"These are the comedians Olsen and Johnson, and although they are not Catholics they too wish to pay you their respects."

The Pope smiled. "Ah," he said, "comedians. That's good. Laughter has no religion. There should be more of it in the world."

You are the comedian's existence. He's only as great as your last laugh.

L'ENVOI

RAGS RAGLAND, LONG AILING, DIES AT 41

Obituary in *Variety*, the Newspaper of Show Business

Hollywood, August 20, 1946—Comedian Beauregard (Rags) Ragland, 41, who successively rose from burlesque to Broadway musi-comedy to films, died at Cedars of Lebanon Hospital this (Tues.) morning while undergoing treatment for Bright's disease and uremic poisoning. He had been in poor health for some time.

He started his theatrical career as a burlesque comedian, trouping with stock outfits and wheel shows for 12 years prior to clicking on Broadway in the musicals, "Panama Hattie," "Who's Who?" and "New Faces."

Ragland was born neither on the stage or backstage. He seemed a long way from the footlights when he was born in Louisville, Kentucky. From schoolbooks he turned to a newspaper route, and from that to a motion picture operator. He eventually became a prizefighter and was reportedly a good one.

He had often been entranced by the burlesque shows that played his hometown. A show was moving out and the second comic was anking the show. The job was open and Ragland walked in and got it. For the ensuing 11 years he played through some 2,000 sketches familiar to burley house patrons, running the gamut from "Ghost in the Pawnshop" to "Floogle Street." He played them all and knew them all by heart.

He was standing in Dinty Moore's (N.Y.) restaurant one day when Buddy de Sylva came in on a tip from the co-author of "Panama Hattie," Herbert Fields. Ragland got the script and the big chance, the first in many years, to catapult from the peel wheels

to a Broadway musical. In fact he assumed that the show was written about him, and he lived the part on and off stage. Ragland went to Hollywood in 1941 under contract to Metro where he was featured as a comedian.

Memorial services will be held in Hollywood tomorrow (21), body to be sent to Louisville for interment.

A son, John, Jr., in the Army, is his sole survivor.

Rags, we sure miss you.

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